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The Ministry of John



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides a comprehensive overview of John the Baptist's ministry and Jesus' baptism as documented in Luke chapter 3. Despite some overlapping material, the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke are not parallel. John's ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus and his preaching of baptism as a symbol of repentance is documented in all four Gospels. Gregg also notes the historical accuracy of Luke's account, confirming details previously disputed or criticized by historians.

Transcript

I'd like for you to turn to Luke chapter 3, and at this point in our studies of the life of Christ, for the first time, we encounter material that has parallels in other Gospels. I suppose there was a parallel in one of our earlier classes where we talked about the genealogies of Christ. There is a genealogy in Matthew and a genealogy in Luke, although they are hardly parallel.

In fact, there's almost nothing that they have in common. But apart from that, we have not encountered any material about which more than one Gospel had anything to say. John's prologue is unique to John and the birth stories and the subsequent childhood stories of Jesus that are found in Matthew and Luke.

Although we bounced back and forth from Matthew to Luke in order to take these stories in sequence, they do not tell the same stories, and therefore there was not parallel accounts. When we come to Luke chapter 3, we come, as I said for the first time, to material that is covered by more than one Gospel. In this case, three different Gospels tell the story of John the Baptist's early ministry, and the narrative culminates in the baptism of Jesus.

In chapter 3, verses 1 through 20, we have essentially Luke's description of the early ministry of John the Baptist, and in verses 21 and 22, we have his description of Jesus being baptized. That discontinues the story of John the Baptist, at least temporarily in Luke, because after that he goes ahead and gives the genealogy of Jesus, which we've already taken, and then the story continues in chapter 4. The material in Luke chapter 3

about John the Baptist that we're about to cover has parallels in Matthew and in Mark. In Matthew, the material is found in chapter 3 also, verses 1 through 17.

Matthew 3, 1 through 17, we won't be looking there at this point, but when it comes to the discussion of Jesus' baptism, we will turn to Matthew because it gives the fullest account of the baptism of Jesus. Mark also parallels this material somewhat in Mark chapter 1, verses 1 through 12 or 13, I think it's 12. We have parallel material.

What we will do is, for the most part, use Luke's gospel account as our basis for study, but I will introduce, as we go through, I will introduce details that are brought up only in Matthew or in Mark, which are absent from the Luke account, just so we don't miss out on any of the details that is found on this subject in any of the three gospels. Some of the details I will give may seem tedious and their importance will not be immediately evident, and that is just the way it is. I don't want to leave out anything that might be significant in anyone's thinking that is included in any of the three gospels.

Let's look now at the beginning of Luke chapter 3. Now, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iteria and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysannaeus the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. Now, Luke does a great deal to nail down the time of John's ministry beginning. The last time we had heard about John, the son of Zechariah, which we now hear again about, was in Luke chapter 1 verse 80, where it had said that the child, this was John the Baptist, the child grew and became strong in spirit and was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

And the day of his manifestation to Israel is what we now come to. And so all of chapter 2 has intervened between the last mention of John and this present focus upon him. Now, all three of the gospels, actually all four of the gospels, place the ministry of John the Baptist prior to the ministry of Jesus.

I mean, obviously it was chronologically prior. But not only do they place it as chronologically prior, they state that it is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. John began his ministry some months, probably, earlier than Jesus began his.

And it's not just a matter of setting the scene for Jesus' ministry to come into, but it's actually the beginning of Jesus' ministry that John the Baptist comes. Because the Old Testament said that as God was going to prepare to send the messenger of the covenant, Jesus Christ, he would first send another messenger before his face to prepare the way before him. And so John's ministry, although it might not have been universally recognized as such, was simply to prepare for Jesus' coming.

I say it might not have been universally recognized as such because even secular historians knew of John the Baptist. We read on another occasion the words of Josephus,

where Josephus gave a brief summary of John the Baptist's ministry. Josephus did not in any sense connect John the Baptist's ministry with Jesus, although Josephus also knew about Jesus.

He had about as much to say about John as he had about Jesus, and he doesn't talk about them both in the same passages and doesn't apparently connect them in his thinking. John the Baptist didn't only talk about Jesus, he also talked about the need for people to repent and be baptized, and that's what Josephus remembers. But the Gospels give us more detail about John's ministry than Josephus does, saying that really more important than just the general call to repent was the fact that John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, This is the one that was to come.

Now, as far as nailing down the time, verses 1 and 2 of Luke chapter 3 do so with great tedium. It's the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. This is believed by most or all scholars to be the year 27 A.D. And then it also mentions some of the other lesser rulers under Caesar who were in the region.

Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, although that's not where most of Jesus' activity took place. He, of course, later was tried under Pontius Pilate. Herod, that'd be Herod Antipas, being tetrarch of Galilee.

Now, Judea and Galilee make up the two principal venues of Jesus' ministry, and apparently also of John's. This early baptizing effort was down in Judea, although it was later up in Galilee that he was arrested by Herod. And so Judea and Galilee were the places where John ministered and later where Jesus mostly ministered, and we are told who the Roman appointees were in leadership in those areas, Pilate and Herod.

And then it says Herod's brother Philip was the tetrarch of Aeturia in the region of Trachonitis, a region that neither Jesus nor John the Baptist ever went to, but apparently is only named here in order to give further detail about the political scene around the area. And it says Lycenaesus was the tetrarch of Abilene. Now, for a long time, those who questioned the accuracy of Luke in general as a historian argued that this was an example of an error in his history.

There was known to have been a man named Lycenaesus who was a king who was executed by Anthony at the behest of Cleopatra in the year 36 BC. And that was the only Lycenaesus known to secular historians, and it couldn't have been, of course, this same Lycenaesus whose reign is placed in the year 27 AD. Obviously, he couldn't be the same Lycenaesus that historians know to have died in 36 BC.

But while Luke was for a little while under the gun in the eyes of scholars about this matter, since the time that the critics first launched their attack, further discoveries have been made. And at one point, an inscription has been found dated between the years 14 and 29 AD. Now, between 14 and 29 AD is this period that we're reading about.

And that inscription was found in Abila, from which Abilene takes its name. And the inscription mentions Lycenaesus the Tetrarch, the very term that Luke used of the Tetrarch of Abilene or of Abila. The inscription, therefore, confirms Luke, and that wouldn't be too surprising.

I mean, what Luke says about Tiberius and about Pontius Pilate and Herod is also confirmed from other history. The only thing is that Luke was the only source of information we had until the finding of this inscription that had retained any memory of this man, Lycenaesus. And in view of the fact that Luke was accused of being accurate, I don't know that those who accused him have ever come forward and apologized when Luke was vindicated.

But I'm sure the scholars often have their own reasons for trying to criticize Luke, other than just that the facts are against him, the facts are almost always in his favor. And so we know something about this Lycenaesus, the Tetrarch of Abilene now. It mentions Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests, and that's a highly peculiar situation, because under the law there should have only been one high priest at any given time.

Aaron was the first high priest. His oldest son, his oldest surviving son, took his place after his death, and likewise every generation after, the oldest surviving son was to take the priesthood. However, that was interrupted, I don't know when it was first interrupted, but it was very badly interrupted during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, where the high priesthood was given to anybody who was the highest bidder.

And in Jesus' own time, Annas was the original high priest, but the Romans apparently felt somewhat threatened by his popularity and his power among the Jews, and so they deposed him and appointed his son-in-law, Caiaphas, to be the high priest. Therefore, Caiaphas was the high priest officially, the Romans had placed him in that position, but his father-in-law, Annas, was actually much more respected by the Jews, and we find that when Jesus was arrested three years after this or so, that they took him first to Annas' house, although he wasn't technically the official and legal high priest, the Jews, rejecting the appointment of the Romans for the most part, still respected Annas above his son-in-law, Caiaphas, though both of them, in one sense, were high priests. Annas was that which was unofficial and recognized by the Jews, Caiaphas was recognized by the Romans as the high priest.

Now, having made reference to all of these powerful people, both in the political and in the religious realm, the next statement sounds almost ironic. In verse 2 it says, The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. Here, after listing all these great and important people, it says the word of God didn't come to any of them.

It came to this hermit out in the wilderness, this nobody, this man whom nobody had noticed up to this point, this guy who had left home sometime in his youth and had gone out and lived in isolation and in solitude and in secrecy for probably the better part of 20

years. And here's all these prominent and visible important people, but the word of God doesn't come to any of them, not even to the high priests. But it comes to this wilderness hermit, John.

And the irony, of course, is that God does not pick those that man sees as important, because John, at that point, was not seen as important by anybody, except maybe his parents. And yet God picks whom he will, even men of no reputation and men of no office. And it says, And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Now, it says he went into all the region about the Jordan. The Jordan River is the eastern border of the land of Israel, and it runs the whole length, north to south, of the country. And therefore, the region of the Jordan does not specify directly what part of the country he was in, except that he was on the eastern border somewhere.

It could have been in the north or the south, except that Matthew's version in Matthew 3.1 tells us he was in the wilderness of Judea. Now, that would place him in the southern region of the country, still at the Jordan River, but in the southern end. So he was down in Judea, in the region near Jerusalem, and we're told a little later that all the people of Judea and Jerusalem came out to be baptized by him.

So John began his ministry in the southern region of the country, though he later was arrested in the northern region. Now, John was a native of Judea. His father and mother, Zechariah and Elizabeth, lived probably in Hebron or some other Levitical city in the mountains of Judea.

Therefore, he was in his own region. How he came to later be arrested by Herod, who was the ruler of Galilee and had no jurisdiction in Judea, we are never told, except we must assume that John took it upon himself, or God put it on him, to leave Judea, his homeland, and go up into Galilee and rebuke King Herod to the point where he was eventually arrested and executed by him. But John was in his own turf, although he left civilization and lived out in the wilderness in the region.

So he went to the Jordan where there was plenty of water to baptize and was in the region of Judea, according to Matthew, and he was preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Now, at that point, in verse 3, it only tells us that he preached baptism. It doesn't say he baptized.

It later mentions that he does. In verse 7, it says multitudes came out to be baptized by him. So clearly, Luke does suggest that John was baptizing, but that's not what he emphasizes first.

The most important thing that John was doing was preaching. He preached that people should be baptized, and if they responded, then he was willing to baptize them. But they

were to be baptized, a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Now, it should not be thought that baptism accomplishes the remission of sins. Baptism is not the means by which sins are remitted. It is repentance that is the condition for the remission of sins.

Baptism was simply to show outwardly that people were willing to repent so that they might have the remission of sins. It is the repentance, not the baptism, that accomplishes the remission of sins, but the baptism was an outward sign. Why John used it, we do not know, except that we know that God told him to, but why that particular emblem of repentance was used is nowhere explained.

We know that the Jews were pretty big time into ceremonial washings, to wash away defilement, and it's very possible that in the mind of John and of those who attended his baptism, that baptism was sort of a washing. And although water doesn't wash away sins, repentance does. And therefore, it may have been that they were to be baptized as a symbol of being washed from their sins, which is the result of their repentance.

The word baptism here is baptizo in the Greek, which is worth knowing something about. Baptizo is spelled just like the English word baptism, except the last two letters are Z-O. B-A-P-T-I-Z-O It is a form, it is the noun form of the verb bapto.

B-A-P-T-O The verb bapto means to dip. It was used in the Greek language to depict the dipping, for example, of cloth into dye. In order to dye a cloth, people would dip it, or bapto the cloth into the cauldron of dye.

It was also used of the motion of dipping a small vessel into a larger vessel to dip out some water or some liquid. And therefore, it's not entirely clear what method John used. Most of us probably, I don't know that this is true, but most of us probably come from traditions where immersion is used of Christian baptism.

I personally think that is the type that was used in the early church. Whether John used the same form or not, we do not know for sure. To use the word dip suggests immersing, although since the Greek word is sometimes used of immersing a smaller vessel into a larger to draw out water, it is possible that the dipping refers to the drawing of water out into a smaller vessel to be poured.

So whether pouring or immersion was practiced by John, we don't know for sure, although at a later time in John's gospel, it says that John baptized in the particular place he did because there was much water there, which suggests the need for much water. If just pouring or sprinkling was being done, it would seem like not much water would be required. But again, we aren't absolutely certain.

This is the same word in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, that is used in 2 Kings 5 and verse 14. 2 Kings 5, verse 14, where Elisha the prophet told Naaman the Syrian to

dip himself seven times in the river Jordan to be cleansed of his leprosy. You may remember the story of this Syrian, this Gentile officer from Syria, one of Israel's enemies, actually heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure leprosy.

And this man had leprosy, and so he went to be cured. He was disappointed by Elisha's answer. Elisha said, dip yourself seven times in the Jordan and you'll be clean.

And the man thought it was a ridiculous prescription. And he at first refused to do it, and only his servant talked him into it and said, listen, if the prophet had told you to do some hard thing, you would have done it. Why not try this easy thing? It can't hurt to try.

And so he did. He went down in the water and he dipped himself seven times, according to the story in 2 Kings 5. And when he came up the seventh time, his skin was like that of a newborn baby. The leprosy was gone.

This has often been seen, and I think rightly so, as a true story that is an allegory as well. A true story that has typical value, or it's like a type. And his very dipping is no doubt a type of baptism.

In the Septuagint, which is the Greek Old Testament, the word bapto is used. In 2 Kings 5.14, the Greek word for baptism is used for what he did. It's interesting that when it says he came up with his skin like that of a newborn baby, it's rather like the promise that is given to Christians that when they believe and repent and they're baptized and so forth, that they're born again.

And we become babes again, in a sense, in Christ. Anyway, it's also interesting that it was the Jordan River where Naaman was to dip himself these seven times, and it's also the same river in which John began baptizing. As far as we know, he only baptized there and no other place, although he moved up and down the river north to south, as we can see elsewhere in the record.

Now, at this point, Luke quotes an Old Testament prophecy. He quotes it from Isaiah 40, verses 3 through 5. The same prophecy and another Old Testament prophecy are given in Mark's gospel, actually prior to the description of John's ministry. In Mark 1, verses 2 and 3, well, actually, if we could read verse 1 as well, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Now, Mark here is quoting two Old Testament prophecies. In some manuscripts, verse 2 says, as it is written in the prophet Isaiah.

The NIV and NASVB and other modern versions probably render it that way. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah. Actually, one of the two quotes is from Isaiah.

The other is from Malachi. The statement, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you, is Malachi 3.1. The other part in Mark 1.3, which says the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight, is from Isaiah 40, verse 3. And that is the verse that Luke quotes, only he quotes it more at length. He goes a couple of verses further through the Isaiah quote.

In Luke 3.4-6 it says, 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 path 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. Now, in the actual Old Testament passage, that last line says, And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. So we see here that the expression, the glory of the Lord, in the quote by Luke, is substituted with the expression, the salvation of God.

All flesh will see the salvation of God. Now, what is this prophecy saying? There is no question about it. It is citation by Luke here, and by Mark, in Mark chapter 1, proves that it is about John the Baptist.

And John himself said so. Over in John chapter 1, when messengers were sent from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist who he was, his answer to them was, in John 1.23, He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. As the prophet Isaiah said.

So there are three witnesses now that Isaiah was writing about John the Baptist. John made this claim about himself, in John 1.23. And then of course both Mark and Luke quote the passage as being about John. So, what is it about John's ministry that corresponds to the words of this prophecy? Well, certainly the first part is clearly like him.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness. That's where John lived, was in the wilderness. And he was no doubt a screamer, out crying in the wilderness.

He was probably out there like some modern street preachers, railing on the people with a loud voice. Now, the statement, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight, which continues in Isaiah. We don't know whether that particular statement was ever found in John's preaching.

It may well have been. He may have preached the exact words that we have here. Or they may be a summary of what he was saying.

John was calling people to repent and be baptized, which was no doubt viewed as, interpreted as, a preparation for the coming of Jesus. That people had to get their hearts right in order to receive Jesus. We can certainly see that by the fact that when Jesus

came, a number of people had not gotten their hearts right, and were not in any sense prepared to receive him.

And even their hearts were so far wrong that they preferred to kill him. But some, no doubt the believing remnant of Israel, needed to be awakened to their perhaps spiritual compromise, even though they might have been reasonably faithful people, yet in the absence of any prophetic word for 400 years, and under the oppression of the Romans, and with only poor examples of religiosity coming from the religious sector, these people may have allowed themselves to drift into some compromise. It happens, even in the best of churches.

And so, in order for these people to become spiritually alert and prepared for the Messiah to come, they needed to be forewarned, they needed to be prepared, their hearts had to be prepared. Because Jesus, as he put it later on, was like a sower sowing seeds. And the seed was the word of the kingdom.

And it would fall on various kinds of ground, different kinds of hearts. Stony ground, the ground by the wayside where the seed wouldn't penetrate, thorny ground, and good soil. It was necessary for people to prepare their hearts, to receive the message of the kingdom that Jesus was bringing, and therefore John came, as it were, to forewarn the people, the people who were eventually to receive Christ, were in need of being forewarned that Jesus was coming, and it was time for them to make sure their hearts were prepared to receive him by repenting of any kind of compromise or sin in their lives.

In verse 5 it says, 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. Now, there was no actual change in the topography of Judea with the coming of Jesus. The valleys did not disappear and the mountains were not leveled.

And by the way, we should bear that in mind, because there are passages in the Old Testament that do describe mountains coming down and valleys coming up. For example, in Zechariah chapter 14, it talks about various mountains being leveled and so forth, and even mountains of olives splitting in two. And there's over in Isaiah chapter 2 the reference that Mount Zion will be elevated above all the hills and all the mountains, which would suggest, if it's literal, that Mount Zion, when Jesus returns, would have to be taller than all the other mountains in the world.

This kind of language is symbolic. We might as well get it through our heads now. Dispensational premillennialists are inclined to take things as literally as possible.

And therefore, when they come to passages like Isaiah chapter 2 or Zechariah chapter 14, they say, that's literally going to happen. Some of those mountains in Israel are going to get lower. Some of them are going to get taller.

There's going to be areas elevated, other places brought low. But listen, we might as well take a cue from Isaiah chapter 40, here quoted. That very same kind of language is used here, but it's not literal.

The figure of speech is simply that of a forerunner going before a king. Remember, in ancient times, paved roads were not everywhere. In fact, before the Romans took over and conquered the world, paved roads were very rare.

The Romans, however, did pave a whole system of roads that would lead to Rome. The expression, all roads lead to Rome, comes from that period. It was necessary for the Romans to be able to mobilize their armies rapidly to all sectors of the empire.

And so roads, like spokes from the hub of Rome, emanated out to all the various provinces, including to Israel. But still, there were a lot of areas where they just didn't have the money or the inclination to pave roads to. And whenever a king in ancient times was coming to a particular city, advance warning would be given so that the citizens of that city could go out and prepare the roads so that the king might not have a bumpy and uncomfortable ride as he comes to their city and arrives somewhat irritated and in poor spirits.

So, you know, maybe a year in advance, it would be announced that a king would be visiting the city and the people would go out there and this is exactly how they would prepare the way of the king. They would fill up the, you know, the potholes and the ditches and so forth that would make his ride rough. If there were any mountains that were too steep to make for a comfortable or easy ascent, they'd tend to level those down.

They would do all they could to make the roads smooth so that the king could come as comfortably as possible and that he might come in in a manner fit for a king. And while John the Baptist wasn't really into demolitions or road construction, his ministry is symbolically described as one who's the forerunner before a king. The king is coming.

Of course, it's not so important what you do with the physical roads, but if he's going to come into your heart, you're going to prepare your heart. You're going to have to prepare the roads, the avenues of entrance to your inner man for the king to be able to find a welcome there and be able to come there without finding obstacles in his path. And so to repent, which is what John called people to do, was the best way to prepare and remove all the obstructions to receiving smoothly and easily what Jesus would have to say and what Jesus would claim over their lives.

And so it's simply a symbolic reference to using the imagery of a forerunner telling people to get the roads ready for the king to come, smooth out the rough places, make the crooked places more straight, bring down those hills and mountains that are in the way and fill up the valleys so that there will be a smooth road for the king to come. This

is all best understood spiritually, of course. And this is basically saying what the import of his message that they had to repent was all about.

It was preparing themselves for the king's arrival. And the final statement, all flesh shall see the salvation of God, which, as I pointed out in the actual original Hebrew of Isaiah 40, verse 4, reads, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, is either looking far into the future. That is, John the Baptist is announcing the coming of Jesus and sometime, some in the distant future, this salvation that he's bringing would be seen in all the world for all flesh.

After all, the message of the gospel was to go to every nation, to every creature, so that all flesh would see the salvation of God. Or else all flesh is simply taken in the geographic local sense. It is sometimes used that way in the Bible.

When the spirit of God was poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Acts chapter 2, Peter said, this is that which was fulfilled, where Joel said, I'll pour out my spirit on all flesh. Well, all flesh certainly hadn't received the Holy Spirit at that time. Only the inhabitants of Jerusalem and only a certain number of them, too.

But all flesh, while it sounds very absolute and all-encompassing and universal to our ears, is a term used frequently in the scripture to speak of just a general widespread experience that many people in a certain area will have. When Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24, he said if those days were not shortened, no flesh would survive. But for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened.

Seemingly, if we took that without any context, it would sound like something global. No flesh would survive, but obviously in the context he's talking about something very local. In fact, largely just confined to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

So be aware that when the Bible says all flesh, it may sometimes be in the context referring to all flesh or the multitude or majority of people within a certain geographical area that's under consideration. When Jesus came, not everyone in the world saw him. Though he was quite visible for a period of time in Israel and especially in Galilee.

And no doubt that's what's referred to when it says all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Jesus is the salvation. That's what his name means.

Jesus means Jehovah is salvation. And that's probably how Isaiah intends for it to be seen. Or as Isaiah says it, the glory of the Lord.

Jesus is the glory of the Lord. All flesh will see it together. Remember how John spoke in his prologue? The word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory.

We saw the glory of God in him. That's, of course, a reference to Jesus' first coming. There is a temptation sometimes to take passages like this from Isaiah and apply them

to the second coming.

But it's quite obvious the New Testament writers did not understand them. So they understood them as being a reference to the first coming of Christ as the citation of it here demonstrates. Now, between verses 6 and 7 of Luke chapter 3, Matthew and Mark both insert a verse or two or three describing John the Baptist's appearance, lifestyle, and his influence.

The longest description of this is in Matthew. I'll read you what Matthew says here and then we'll get back into the Luke passage. Luke just leaves this out entirely, but Matthew and Mark include it.

In Matthew 3 verses 4 through 6, we're not done with Luke, but this is just something to insert between these two verses. Matthew 3 verses 4 through 6 says, And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

That passage I just read from Matthew 3 verses 4 through 6, it has a parallel in Mark 1 verses 5 and 6, but no parallel in Luke. Mark 1 verses 5 and 6 also contains the information in a little less detail. Now let's just talk about that for a moment.

John's description. He was dressed in camel's hair. This has often been mistaken to be a reference to the pelt or the skin of the camel with the hair on it, like the hairy pelt.

Like you'll sometimes buy sheep skins with the fleece on them and so forth for wrapping babies in or something. In Australia they do that, and over here I guess to a certain extent that is done as well. But he wasn't wearing a fleece or a pelt of a camel.

Camel's hair is a reference to a kind of cloth that was woven from camel's hair, just like wool is woven from sheep's hair or sheep's wool. Wool clothing is made from the hair of a sheep. There was a very coarse kind of cloth, almost as coarse as sackcloth, that was woven from camel's hair.

Most people would prefer not to wear it, but it was a cheaper kind of cloth than any other kind. And for that reason, the poorest of the people sometimes had no choice but to wear camel's hair. John's wearing of camel's hair might have been simply because it was coarse and maybe durable, and he lived out in the wilderness and didn't buy a change of clothes very often.

Or it might have been that he wished to simply live like the poor of the land, the ones that it says later in James were chosen of God to be rich in faith, the poor of this world. Or, more likely than either of those two possibilities, his reason for wearing camel's hair probably was because of its rough and uncomfortableness. It was like wearing sackcloth.

And traditionally, in the Old Testament, when people would repent and wanted to really show that they were repenting, they would take off their ordinary clothing and put on sackcloth. Sometimes they'd even wear sackcloth under their ordinary clothing, next to their skin. Sort of a way of doing penance, I guess.

Maybe that's where the Roman Catholic ideas of doing penance for sins came from, from the idea of kind of making yourself uncomfortable, inconvenience yourself, to show that you really are sorry. And in the Old Testament times, they'd sometimes put ashes on their heads as well. I'm not sure exactly of the symbolism of that, but it is known to take place a number of times in the Old Testament that people would repent in sackcloth and ashes.

And probably since John the Baptist's message was predominantly a call to repentance, he no doubt illustrated his message by wearing the garments that would suggest repentance, wearing sackcloth of camel's hair. We know in the Old Testament, a number of the prophets actually were called upon to visually illustrate the messages they had. Isaiah actually was to predict the fact that the Babylonians were going to overrun Egypt, and the Egyptians would be taken away naked with bare bottoms into Babylon or Assyria.

I forget which. I think it's Babylon in that particular prophecy, in Isaiah chapter 20. Yeah, I think it's Isaiah chapter 20.

And Isaiah was himself required to walk around with his buttocks bare for three years in public in order to illustrate that the Egyptians would go bare-bottomed away into Egypt. I guess as a part of the humiliation of the captives, I mean into Babylon, the captors would tear off the bottom part of the garments of their captives so they'd walk away naked. There are actually base reliefs and so forth from Assyrian digs in the British Museum that show people being taken away nude or with bare bottoms into captivity.

It was just another way of humiliating captives. Isaiah had to humiliate himself and walk around that way for three years. I realize this raises all kinds of questions in our minds, perhaps questions we can't answer with certainty as to just how naked was he, but the Bible just says he had to walk around naked for three years, and that was to illustrate his message.

Jeremiah had to make an ox yoke and put it over his neck to represent the fact that the Jews were going to bear the yoke of bondage to Babylon, and so he walked around with a yoke over his neck. Ezekiel frequently illustrated his prophecies in various ways, so we can't really go into detail about those. He would dig through a wall or he would act out something publicly for people to see and then he'd give the interpretation of it.

In one case, even his wife died and he was told not to mourn for her because it was the same day that Jerusalem had been besieged and no one was to mourn for Jerusalem's

fall either. So the prophets a lot of times had to live out their prophecies, sometimes at great cost themselves. Hosea, whose message was that Israel had been an adulteress and God was divorcing her, but he would take her back if she repented, he was told to actually marry a woman who was known to be an adulteress and she committed adultery against him and he had to take her back after that.

So the very lifestyle of the prophet frequently had to illustrate his message. John's message was a message of repentance and no doubt that is why he wore sackcloth or camel's hair. He also wore a leather belt which I think I mentioned before was not as normal in those days as it is in our days to wear a leather belt.

But we are told, in fact I think the only other person in the Bible who is specifically said to have worn a leather belt was Elijah the prophet. In 2nd Kings chapter 1 it mentions that he was a hairy man who wore a leather belt and that being so, we have reason to believe that the mention of John the Baptist's hairy belt, I mean leather belt, he was a hairy man too because he was a Nazirite, but that his leather belt was no doubt a direct mimicry of the attire of Elijah the prophet. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah and there are more than one way in which he resembled Elijah.

The passage about Elijah wearing a leather belt is 2nd Kings 1.8 where it says he was a hairy man and wore a leather belt around his waist. 2nd Kings 1.8. So only two men in the Bible I think are said to have worn a leather belt, Elijah and John the Baptist and it's no accident that they two had that in common because they had many things in common. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah.

As far as his diet, eating locust and wild honey, we don't know whether God specifically told him to eat nothing else or if it is simply telling us that this was the main thing he ate because he lived in the wilderness and he didn't eat cultivated crops. Unlike most city dwellers who would buy their food or grow it themselves on their farms and would eat grain and other things as their main staple, John didn't have a farm going out in the wilderness, he just foraged. And the things most abundant for him to eat, they may not have made his entire diet up, but they might have, were honey, which he got from, it was wild, he was not a beekeeper, he didn't raise bees to harvest the honey, he just, where he found it, in the wild, he ate it, and locusts.

Now the eating of locusts or grasshoppers is fairly abhorrent to people in our culture and so many commentators have tried to take away the offense of this by saying, well, you know, probably when it says he ate locusts, it doesn't really mean what we think of as locusts. There is a plant in the wilderness of Judea that grows a type of carob that was very possibly referred to as the locust plant. And they say John was not probably eating insects, but eating these carobs, and that's what's referred to as locusts.

I don't know to what degree there is support for that theory. Some commentators have put it forward, but there's no reason that we would be compelled to accept it. There were

an abundance of insect locusts in the wilderness of Judea and in the passages in the Old Testament which list the clean and the unclean animals, which the Jews were and were not allowed to eat, locusts are among the few insects that were clean.

Most insects are listed as unclean animals, but locusts and any other insect whose hind legs extend above their bodies, like jumping insects, crickets, locusts, grasshoppers, they were exceptions to the rule. Most insects were unclean, but hopping insects like locusts were specifically singled out as being clean and edible. Now, I don't know to what degree Jews found locusts to be pleasant food or how often they availed themselves of their freedom under the law to eat them, but since locusts are mentioned as potential food in the Old Testament, there's no reason to rule out the idea that John ate them in the wilderness.

And he would receive protein, of course, from locusts because all animal food has about equal amount of protein. Although there's not much meat on a locust compared to a cow or a lamb, you'd have to eat a lot more locusts. But the best thing that could happen for John would be for there to be a locust plague, I suppose.

But anyway, he ate just what food he could forage out there. Now, the passage in Matthew that we're talking about here that describes him goes on and mentions how much influence he had. It says, Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all of the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Once again, this all Judea, all of Jerusalem went out to be baptized is no doubt a hyperbole. There certainly must have been a few people, at least, who didn't get baptized. It suggests he baptized everyone in the entire city.

Perhaps this is an unnecessary literalism to apply to the passage. But it does suggest that somehow he got the attention of the whole area. We aren't told how.

He was preaching in the wilderness, presumably where there weren't many people. Although he may have stood along the routes where pilgrims would travel who were traveling from Galilee to Judea for the festivals and so forth. And he may have stood alongside the road and begun to preach.

And then the people would stand and listen to him, maybe even be baptized. And then as they would go on into Jerusalem for the festival, they would say, Do you hear about that crazy guy out there? And then all of Judea would begin to hear about it and go out there. I'm only guessing.

I don't know that that's how he got attention. It's nowhere explained how it is that this guy who was a hermit got the attention of the entire country. But it is entirely possible that he took advantage of the people who would go on foot through the region of the wilderness in order to avoid going through Samaria.

And he may have positioned himself on a pilgrim route where he could have quite a number of people go within earshot and preach to them. Now, it says eventually everyone who knew about him was going. And it says they did so confessing their sins.

That's Matthew 3.6. And so confession of sins was part of the process of being baptized. They would confess their sins, which would of course suggest repentance. Then they'd be baptized to visibly depict probably the cleansing of the sins that they had confessed.

And all this was the outward evidence of an inward repentance for the remission of their sins. Now we return to Luke's narrative, 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? 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.

And even now the axe 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. So the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 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. 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. Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said to them, Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.

Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, or the Messiah, 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. His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

And with many other exhortations he preached to the people, but Herod the Tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother, Philip's wife, and for all evils which Herod had done, also added this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Now this statement in verse 19 is really by way of anticipation, because obviously Herod didn't shut up John in prison before he baptized Jesus, and the baptism of Jesus is mentioned in verses 21 and 22 after the imprisonment of John is mentioned. Essentially, this verse 19 is just stuck in parenthetically.

It is not in its proper chronological place, but it anticipates what became of John at a later time than that which is here being described. Because after all, this ministry was taking place in Judea, in the wilderness of Judea, whereas Herod only had jurisdiction in

the north, in Galilee, and it's unlikely that John was down in Judea rebuking Herod. He must have at a later date gone up into Galilee and stood outside the window of Herod's palace and started rebuking him, and that's when he would have come under Herod's jurisdiction.

So, again, verse 19 tells us what eventually happened to John, but it doesn't necessarily place it at this time, in this time frame. It just mentions it because John is under discussion, and soon would no longer be under discussion. Now, let's talk about these verses in some detail.

In verse 7 it says, Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, and then he says these really scathing words. Now, it might seem strange that he would say this to everybody, but Matthew tells us that the reason he said these words was that he saw a particular element in the crowds that he knew were hypocrites, and he was really addressing his words to them. It doesn't say so in Luke, but in Matthew 3.7 it says, When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, brood of vipers, etc.

So, these words that are recorded in Luke 3.7 and following were really addressed, we're told in Matthew, to the Pharisees and the Sadducees who were there coming to be baptized. Interesting that they'd come to be baptized. No doubt this was just a part of their whole outward show of trying to prove themselves to be religious.

John the Baptist had not yet insulted them sufficiently for them to take an aloof or opposing stand. At a later time in history, the Pharisees and the other leaders, the Jews, would actually oppose John the Baptist. But at this point, they thought they'd kind of get into the system and show that they were as religious as anybody else.

Although it's interesting that since being baptized by John involved people confessing their sins, this would require that these guys come and confess their sins, which one would hardly expect the Pharisees to be eager to do in a public situation since their whole power and influence in society was based on the idea that they didn't really have any sins. They were keepers of the law to perfection. They must have been going through some kind of an inward struggle over this question of whether they should go be baptized by John.

On the one hand, they probably would rather ignore him. But on the other, everybody who was anybody was saying that this is the way that people of God are going to have to, you know, this is a prophet of God calling his people to be baptized and the Pharisees would hardly wish to be on the outside of anything that was perceived to be from God. And so they came, but their motivations were not pure.

And John picked up on it right away. To those Sadducees and Pharisees, he had nothing good to say. He called them a brood of vipers.

A viper, of course, is a deadly type of serpent, type of snake. And a brood simply means the offspring. He's calling them children of the devil.

Jesus used the same expression talking to the Pharisees and scribes at a later time. In Matthew 23, when he was rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, he also referred to them as a brood of vipers. That's in Matthew 23.

And I haven't looked it up, so I need to look it up here. It's in Matthew, what? 33. Matthew 23, 33.

Right. I had almost found it. Serpents brood, excuse me, serpents, brood of vipers, Jesus called them.

How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Jesus apparently got his language here, in this case from John the Baptist, who had first called them by that name. They were a brood of serpents. Or to put it in other words, Jesus said they were of their father, the devil, in John 8, 44.

Which is another way of saying the same thing. They are descendants of Satan, certainly not physically. Spiritually speaking, they were in league with Satan, not with God.

In Revelation chapter 2 and verse 9, and again in Revelation chapter 3 and verse 9, both of those places, Revelation 2, 9 and Revelation 3, 9, both places Jesus speaks of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are indeed the synagogue of Satan, or a synagogue of Satan. Revelation 2, 9 and Revelation 3, 9, both places speak of people who say they are Jews, obviously they would be ethnic Jews or else they wouldn't call themselves Jews, but Jesus says he doesn't recognize them as Jews. He said they are not, but they are actually a synagogue of Satan.

This is almost the same thing as saying they are of their father, the devil, or they are a brood of serpents, the serpent's brood. Satan is the serpent. So, John and Jesus both, and even in the book of Revelation, Jesus is still saying that certain Jewish people don't have any real claim to that title of Jew.

In fact, John says in verse 8 of Luke 3, Don't say Abraham is your father. That won't get you anywhere. You may say you are Jews, you may say you are descendants of Abraham, but there is something far more important than that.

In fact, God could raise up these stones, children of Abraham. Now, in verse 7, he says to them, Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? What is the wrath to come of which he speaks? Well, the easiest way for this to be understood by most Christians is just to have it a reference to hell and the judgment. However, I personally think he has something more immediate in mind, something more threatening at the moment, and that was, of course, the rising tension between the Jews and the Romans, which eventually erupted into a war in 66 A.D. during the lifetime of many of these same

people, and, of course, to the eventual destruction of the Jewish state in 70 A.D. and that was a time of wrath, as the Bible elsewhere speaks quite plainly of it, God's wrath upon them.

Now, these people, in coming to be baptized, if they were repentant, if they were genuine, they could escape that wrath, because everybody who did receive Christ, every Jew who received Christ did escape, and did not get trapped. In Jerusalem in 70 A.D., all the Christians fled, and they went across the river of Jordan to Pella, and there they were safe before the siege took place. So, John may be implying that there is an imminent judgment coming.

He certainly indicates that in verse 9, where he says, Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. He's talking about an imminent judgment.

He says that the axe is already laid to the root, as if the woodsman is just measuring and ready to make his swing to cut these trees down by the roots. He's not talking about something in the distance. He's not talking about the second coming of Christ, or even necessarily what's going to happen to these people after they die, because that wasn't necessarily imminent.

But, the judgment on the nation was relatively imminent compared to how many centuries God had put up with them, and there was now only one generation left before these fruitless trees would be all cut down and thrown into the fire. Likewise, of course, down in verse 17, where he says, His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will thoroughly purge his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Likewise, he's saying the same thing in both places. In verse 9 and in verse 17, John is saying that God is even now, right now, separating between those Jews who would be comparable to wheat and those that are comparable to chaff. The same division is referred to as trees that have fruit and trees that don't have fruit.

The genuine trees that God wants to keep around are those that bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, according to verse 8. He says, therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance. And in verse 9, he says, the trees that don't have these good fruits, the trees that don't really have a credible evidence of having repented, are going to be burned. Those who do repent, of course, would not suffer that judgment.

Now, in verse 17, where he likens it to separating between wheat and chaff, this image comes from the Old Testament in the book of Amos, right after the book of Joel, is the book of Amos. And in Amos chapter 9, verses 8 through 10, there is this prophecy, which I take to be relevant to the subject that John is preaching. Amos chapter 9, verses 8 through 10.

The prophet says, Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, meaning Israel, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord, for surely I will command and I will sift the house of Israel among the nations as grain is sifted in a sieve. Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.

That is, not one grain will fall through the cracks of the sieve. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say the calamity shall not overtake us nor confront us. Now, this is a New Testament setting.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is a New Testament setting. The reason we know that is because verse 11, Amos 9, verse 11 says, On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen down. And we know that that passage is quoted in Acts chapter 15 as finding fulfillment.

In the influx of Christian Gentiles into the early church, Amos 9, 11, and 12 is quoted by the apostles in Acts 15 as having a fulfillment in the coming of Gentiles into the church in their own day. Therefore, the time frame of Amos' prophecy is first century Christian times. And therefore, when he says, I'm going to destroy this sinful nation, but I'm not going to utterly destroy all the Jews, I'm going to separate the wheat from the chaff.

This sifting them as wheat is a reference to the process of using a sieve to get the chaff, which was smaller than the wheat kernels, to fall through. And, of course, the wheat kernels, which were to be preserved, would not fall through the holes. They were larger.

And he says, Yet not one grain of wheat is going to fall to the ground. In other words, he's not going to lose even one of his remnant. The Jewish remnant, who are believers, were like the wheat.

The apostate Jews were like the chaff. And he says, Not one of the faithful grains is going to fall to the ground. He says in Amos 9, verse 9. But in verse 10, he says, All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which is the chaff.

And this judgment, this separation between the wheat and the chaff, in the first century, is associated with the coming of Jesus and what he accomplished there. That is what John the Baptist is no doubt alluding to in Luke 3.17, when he says, His winnowing fan is already in his hand and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Echoing this judgment prophecy of Amos.

Let's look at some of these other things John said in some detail. He said in verse 8, That there is nothing to boast of by being descended from Abraham. That must have come as a shock to them, although it needn't have.

In the Old Testament, there's a number of times when God makes it plain that certain

Jews who were truly descended from Abraham physically were lost and were not his people. Hosea spoke about this from time to time and other prophets made it very clear that many Jews would perish and come under God's judgment in spite of the fact or without reference to the fact that they were descended from Abraham. John reminds them that physical descent from Abraham counts for nothing.

So little in fact, that God could replace physical descendants of Abraham from the stones themselves. He could make of these stones children of Abraham. You know, Jesus said something that I often in my mind connect with this statement.

When Jesus was riding triumphantly on a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the children were waving palm branches and saying, you know, Hosea to the son of David, save now king of the Jews and so forth. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The religious leaders were very uncomfortable with this.

And they said to Jesus, don't you hear what they're saying? Rebuke them. Don't you realize this will get us into trouble with the Romans? And Jesus said, well, if these would be silent at this time, the very stones themselves would cry out. The idea that the stones could cry out and praise God or that God could raise up of the stones children of Abraham are probably really just examples of hyperbole.

But it is interesting that in 1 Peter 2 and verse 5, 1 Peter 2, 5, Peter says that we are all like living stones built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood that we should offer up spiritual sacrifices. What are spiritual sacrifices? Our praises to God, stones praising God, living stones built up into a spiritual house and praising God, offering up these spiritual sacrifices. How do we know that praise of God is a spiritual sacrifice? Well, it says so in Hebrews 13, 15.

In Hebrews 13, 15 it says that we need to offer up the sacrifice of praise to God, even the fruit of our lips, a spiritual sacrifice. Now, that Jesus said the stones would cry out and praise Him if the Jews ceased to do so was rather interesting because in a sense that did happen. The Jews did cease to praise Him and He raised up of the stones themselves, as it were, the least expected source, Gentiles, children of Abraham and those who would praise Him.

Of course, not literally from the stones, but that which Peter refers to as living stones is us, Christians. And there may or may not have been an intentional connection between the statement of John the Baptist on this occasion about raising up from the stones children of Abraham or in Jesus' statement that the stones or the rocks would praise Him. Maybe no connection with Peter's statement that we are living stones who offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise to God.

And we certainly are later in that same passage in 1 Peter described in terms that used to apply to the sons of Abraham. We are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy

nation, he says in 1 Peter 2, 9. And maybe he has these statements in view. He may not.

Just a point of interest. Now, Luke 3, 9, we already mentioned that the axe is laid to the root of the trees, the fruitless trees, those that are presumably, those that have not brought forth fruits of repentance, mentioned in verse 8, are going to be cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus said twice elsewhere, also Luke records it, in Luke 13, 3, in Luke 13, 3, Jesus said, I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Luke 13, 3, and also Luke 13, 5, He says the same thing. I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. If you don't repent, you will perish.

Now, he was not talking, as we might apply these words, to people generically that if they don't repent and accept Jesus, they're all going to go to hell. That is true, but that's not what he was talking about. They had just told him about a disaster where Pilate had slain Galileans in the temple.

The Roman governors murdered Galileans in the temple. And Jesus said, these men weren't worse than others. In fact, the same thing will happen to all of you if you don't repent.

The ones who didn't repent were wiped out by the Romans in the temple, as a matter of fact. That's where most of them died, when the Romans broke through in 70 AD. People also told Jesus about 18 people who had died when the Tower of Siloam fell upon them.

We don't know much about the Tower of Siloam, but it was a tower in Jerusalem. There was a pool of Siloam in Jerusalem. And apparently it collapsed.

From what cause, we don't know. We don't have any information about it. But Jesus said also about that, unless you repent, you will also similarly perish.

Likewise perish, means in the same way. Certainly, many people died as the walls and the towers of Jerusalem were knocked down by the Romans when they came in, in 70 AD. Jesus is no doubt referring to the fact that those who did not repent and were trapped in Jerusalem during the siege did perish in that situation.

And John the Baptist is saying something similar here. If you don't repent, or if you don't bring forth good fruits, which is fruits of your repentance, you will perish. You'll be thrown in the fire like a fruitless tree.

And by the way, this statement in Luke 3.9, where he makes the statement about fruitless trees being thrown in the fire, in Matthew's version he joins this statement. He marries it together with the statements that are here found in Luke 3.16 and 17. You'll no doubt remember when we were talking about the subject of baptism with fire, which we used Matthew's gospel as our source, Matthew 3, verses 10 through 12.

The statements that are here found in Luke 3.9 about the fruitless trees, and the statement about baptizing with fire and the Holy Spirit in verse 16 here, and also the statement about separating the wheat and the chaff and burning the chaff with unquenchable fire, which is here found in Luke 17, these three statements are put in sequence in Matthew's version, as if to create a symmetry, because all three of the statements end with the word fire. Here we see it in Luke 3.9, Luke 3.16, and Luke 3.17. All three statements end with the word fire. And in the first and the last of these statements, the fire clearly is a reference to the destruction and the judgment that would come upon those who do not repent.

I suggested in an earlier lecture that that might be the best way to understand what John meant when he said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Some would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, the rest would be baptized with fire. After all, he did say those who bear fruit will survive, and those who don't bear fruit will be thrown into the fire.

Those who are wheat will survive, and those who are chaff will be thrown into the fire. Those who were baptized in the Holy Spirit survived. Those who did not receive Christ were baptized with fire.

That's how Matthew puts these statements together, no doubt, to make that particular point. Now, Luke gives us some information that none of the other Gospels do about John, and that's found in verses 10 through 14. And this is in the private interviews between John and certain groups of people.

It says in Luke 3.10, So the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? And 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. Now, I suppose we should ask ourselves, is this a command that Christians should observe? And my answer would be yes and no.

First of all, John the Baptist is not the Lord. We don't have to do what he says in particular. He was, in fact, more of the order of an Old Testament prophet.

And his instructions do not reflect the instructions of one who had even entered the kingdom of God yet, because Jesus indicated that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John. But what he said was basically a practical application of that which the New Testament does teach, and that is that you should love your neighbors yourself. And there are a number of places in the New Testament, in addition to the places where Jesus himself says you should love your neighbors yourself, there are places in the epistles where the requirement of loving your neighbor in practical and tangible ways, like giving to them if you have extra, are mentioned.

In 1 John chapter 3, 1 John 3 verses 16 through 18 says, By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us, and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But

whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Now, he says to love must be not only something we say we do, but we must actually do it.

How do you do it? Well, he says, for example, you see your brother in need and you've got something to help him, and you don't do anything for him, how can you claim to have the love of God in you then? Look over at James chapter 2. In James 2 and verse 8, James says, If you really fulfill the royal law, the law of the kingdom, according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well. Now, James tells us we are to follow this royal law. Royal means it has to do with the kingdom of God.

It's a kingly law. Royal. It's the law of the kingdom of God.

Love your neighbor as yourself. So, if you really do that, you do well. Further down, though, in verse 15 and 16.

James 2, 15 and 16. He says, If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? So, you are supposed to fulfill the royal law that says love your neighbor as yourself. But he says, What does it profit? If you see a brother in need, and he has no clothing or no food, and you don't give him any.

You just say, God bless you, brother, go in peace, be warmed and filled. That doesn't help. And so, the New Testament emphasizes the fact that love for your brother, to love your neighbors as yourself, is something you do practically.

That's what John is essentially saying in other terms. He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none. He who has food, let him do likewise.

Now, there is a statement in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8. Where Paul makes, states as an ideal for the Christians, something that would be, it's hard to know to what extent it needs to be facilitated, but it is no doubt a good ideal. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is asking the Corinthian Christians to take up an offering to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Christians they'd never met and probably never would meet.

Yet, they were in the same body, even though they lived in other parts of the empire, but they were brothers they knew who had need. And he said in verse 13, For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, and their abundance also may supply your lack, that there may be equality as it is written, he now quotes from Exodus 16, He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Now, is Paul saying this should be the way the economics of the kingdom of God are facilitated?

That those who gather more shouldn't have any extra, and those who gather too little should have no lack? Some would make this the basis of a strict Christian socialism or communism.

I think basically to do that is to lapse into a legalism that Paul never intended. It is true that in Acts chapter 2 and in Acts chapter 4, we read of the Christians selling what they had and distributing to those who had need, but they did so freely and willingly without being forced to. Furthermore, Paul in writing to the Corinthians does not suggest that they already were having such an economic system in the church, where those who gathered much had no extra, but he's stating that as an ideal, that if you have extra and somebody doesn't have enough, certainly it makes sense that brotherly love would incline you to have nothing over if that's what is necessary to make sure your brother has enough.

Now, if your brother has enough, and you have enough and more, then perhaps we shouldn't try to make some kind of legalism that says you shouldn't have anything extra. But as long as your brother has lack, the suggestion is for you to have extra isn't what is ideal. Now, those statements we've just read in James and in 1 John and in 2 Corinthians are from the New Testament, and of course they are simply different ways of applying Jesus' own words, love your neighbors yourself.

No doubt what John is saying here, if you have extra stuff, give it to someone who doesn't have any, is simply a way of applying the same rule, love your neighbors yourself. Be as concerned about his needs as you are for your own. And that was part of preparing one's heart, preparing the way for Jesus to come, because Jesus was going to make similar requirements upon people.

Verse 12, Luke 3, 12. 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. Tax collectors were Jewish people who had gone into business working for the Romans to collect the taxes from their countrymen.

They were pretty much hated, not only for their treason in working for the enemy in raising taxes, but also because they tended to be crooks. We don't know that every tax collector was a crook, but they all had that reputation. We know that Jesus was in the home of a tax collector named Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19, and the guy got saved.

And when he got saved, he said, I'm going to bestow half my goods on the poor, and if I've wronged anyone, I'm going to restore four times as much to them if I've robbed anyone. The assumption is that he had. He was going to have to reckon up how many people he'd robbed and of how much, so that he could make fourfold restitution.

That's in Luke 19.8. But no doubt Zacchaeus was not unusual in this respect as a tax collector. He had wronged some people, and it was possible to do. He alone knew

exactly how much people owed, well, he and the Romans did.

But he's the only one who knew both what was owed and what was paid. The Romans knew what was owed by the people who didn't know how much they paid the tax collector. The people knew how much they paid their tax collector, but they didn't know how much the Romans required.

Therefore, the middleman had both sets of information. He's the only one who did. There was no accountability.

If he knew that you owed the government \$100, you didn't know that. He did, but he could have charged you \$150 and pocket the \$50, and the Romans wouldn't know that you'd paid that much. So it was a great temptation, and very few probably were able to resist that temptation.

In fact, in all likelihood, anyone who had stooped so low as to become a tax collector probably did so for base motives such as this. It's unlikely that there were any honest tax collectors. So when the tax collectors say to John, what do we have to do? He says, well, you've got to be honest.

You've got to only exact as much as you have come and no more. Then the soldiers asked him, saying in verse 14, what shall we do? And he said to them, do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely and be content with your wages. Now, don't intimidate anyone is not a literal translation.

The King James says, do violence to no one. This rendering is also not absolutely literal. The way it's been rendered in the King James has led some to believe that the soldiers were told not to do anything physically violent to anybody, and that makes a good proof text for pacifists, telling soldiers not to do any violence.

I mean, who other than soldiers have it as their business to do violence? It would almost be the same as saying, get out of the army. But the word in the Greek actually doesn't mean violence in the generic sense. It means to shake violently.

Literally, it means don't shake violently anyone. And most scholars believe it's referring to the practice of Roman soldiers to shake down people for bribes and for money. In fact, I think there's something like that.

Yeah, shake down for money is what it says in the margin of this Bible. The text of the New King James simply paraphrases that, is don't intimidate people. It's not referring necessarily to fighting in war or even enforcing the law against criminals.

It's talking about unjust intimidation and the use of violent force against innocent citizens to get them to give them money. And apparently the Roman soldiers did that. It's interesting that Roman soldiers would be asking John the Baptist what to do.

Once again, we see some Gentiles sensitive to their need for God, which is a theme that comes up again and again in the Gospels. Now, he told them to be honest, essentially. Don't exploit people, don't oppress people, don't abuse their power, and don't accuse people falsely.

I don't know to what extent that was happening, but it must have happened quite a bit for John to have to include that. And be content with your wages. That's interesting because that speaks of basically the motivation why they would shake down people or accuse falsely.

They might take bribes to make false accusations in court against people, or they might intimidate people to get money out of them. But if they were just content with what they're getting, content with their wages, that would remove all temptation to do those things. Contentment, however, is a very elusive quality.

It is nonetheless a Christian quality and one that Christians need to cultivate or learn. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians chapter 4 that he had learned. And the word learned is from the Greek word for mystery.

It's as if he'd been initiated into something that's a mystery, a secret. In Philippians 4.11 he says, I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. It is something that doesn't come naturally.

You almost have to be initiated into a spiritual breakthrough to come to a place where you're really content in whatever state you're in. Paul says he'd had that initiation, he'd had that breakthrough. He'd had that spiritual, he'd crossed that spiritual threshold where he now was truly content in whatever state he was in.

He happened to be in prison at the time he wrote it. Now, contentment is simply being resigned to your circumstances. Being willing to bear them patiently with a quietness of spirit, without being agitated, without wishing things were otherwise, at least not wishing strongly enough as to make you discontented about the present situation.

You might vaguely wish that things might get better, but you are quite content or at peace or at rest in your soul, even if things remain as they are. That's what contentment is. Now, that doesn't come naturally to people, but it can be learned.

But what is the basis for it? Well, it says over in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 5, Hebrews 13, 5, it says, Let your conduct be without covetousness, that's greed, and be content with such things as you have. For he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. That's the secret of contentment.

You can be content with such things as you have because he has said, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. And if you have him, it doesn't matter if you have anything else. Even if you starve to death for lack of food, if he will never leave you, you've got nothing

to gripe about.

Because even if you starve to death, you'll have him forever. And dying is not a great disaster for those who are in Christ. It is promotion.

So, whatever we have or lack, it shouldn't matter to us. It should not have any effect on our happiness. Our happiness should not be controlled in any sense by our circumstances.

Whether we feel like we're underpaid for the work we're doing, or whether we feel like we're underappreciated, or that someone has it better than we do, or whatever. It says, be content with what you have because God will never leave you nor forsake you, and that should be enough. Paul states it this drastically in 1 Timothy chapter 6. 1 Timothy chapter 6, beginning with verse 6. But godliness with contentment is great gain.

I'm going to read further, but just let me point out what he said there. It's not being rich that is great gain. It's being content and godly.

Because a man who's rich is seldom content, in which case he has no ability to enjoy his riches fully, because he's always only looking at how much he doesn't yet have, and how much more he hopes to obtain before he can really rest in the conviction that he has enough. And the man who is content, whether he's rich or poor, has greater gain than the man who's rich and is not content with what he has. Because what the rich man who's striving after more money is simply seeking is contentment.

He's seeking to reach a level where he can rest content with what he has. But riches are deceptive in that way. They don't really give contentment.

They only offer it, but that's the deceptiveness of riches that Jesus spoke of. Jesus said the thorns that choked out the good seed in the thorny soil was those who are deceived by the deceitfulness of riches, and the cares of this world. And the deceitfulness of riches is that they promise you that if you get enough of them you'll be content, but they never deliver on what's promised.

They deceive you. And the man who seeks after riches simply keeps pursuing after more and more. He's never really able to enjoy himself as a rich man until he chooses to be content.

And you can choose to be content at a much lower level of affluence. You can choose to be content in any circumstance, Paul said. And so he goes on here in verse 7, For we brought nothing into this world, and it's certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of

evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

A lot of graphic language here describing the danger of desiring to be rich. Well, most Christians I know, even ones who I would call rich, would say, Oh, I don't desire to be rich. I wouldn't want to be classed with those who desire to be rich, since they fall into damnation and perdition and destruction, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

But that just depends on what you call rich. Some people just want to be middle class. What we call middle class, however, may very well be rich, in terms of the world, or even in terms of our own nation.

What is rich contrasted with in this passage? There's those who desire to be rich, and they are contrasted, in verse 8, with those who have food and clothing, and are content with food and clothing. Now, in the Middle East, it was warm enough they didn't even necessarily have to have housing. The Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head, even though foxes had holes and birds had nests.

It was possible to survive in that mild climate, even without a permanent shelter. In this part of the world, we would have to include shelter as one of the needs, along with food and clothing. But the point is, having essentially what we need for survival, Paul says we should be capable of being content with that.

Now, he didn't say there's anything wrong with having more than that. But there is something wrong with being discontented if we only have such things. If God blesses you with more than what you yourself are demanding and striving after, that's His business.

And it's no sin on your part to be blessed by God. But if He hasn't blessed you with those things, for you to strive and to desire and to crave those things is to fall into hurtful lusts that drown your soul in destruction and perdition. Whatever level of affluence, or whatever your standard of living, the Bible urges you to be content with it.

Now, the soldiers probably were inclined to bear false witness for money and also to intimidate people for money because of some conviction on their part that they weren't paid what they were worth and they needed to supplement their income. So John says be content with your wages, which is also very agreeable with New Testament teaching about Christians being content with whatever they have. Now, we don't have to go into great detail.

We only have a few minutes, in fact, before I have to close this session. But verses 16 through 20 tell us that the people wondered if John was the Messiah or not. Since there was great expectation in those days that the Messiah might appear, of course, John was the first guy to make much of a splash on the religious scene.

And so they thought, initially and understandably, that maybe he was the Messiah. And they said he wasn't. He said he wasn't even worthy to loose the sandal of the Messiah.

He said, I indeed, verse 16, only baptize you with water. Matthew 3, verse 11 states it a little more fully, with water unto repentance. Matthew 3, verse 11 says, I baptize with water unto repentance.

But one mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to loose. In Mark, he says, I'm not even worthy to stoop down and loose his sandal strap. Matthew has him saying, I'm not worthy to carry his sandals.

In any case, he's describing the function of a slave. A slave would greet people coming into the house, take their shoes off and wash their feet for them, and take their sandals to the place where they'd be stored. He says, I'm not even worthy to do the most menial servant chores for this guy, this one who's coming after me.

You may think I'm something, because all the nation is coming out and is impressed with my preaching. But I'm not even worthy to be a slave of the one who's coming after me. I'm only baptizing with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Since we've talked on other occasions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, we will not linger on the subject right now. He's clearly saying that the water baptism was nothing compared to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which would be a spiritual thing. Of course, their repentance, which was emblemized by their water baptism, was a spiritual thing too.

But repentance simply allows for the remission of sins. The presence of the Holy Spirit goes further and causes the anointing and God's presence to dwell inside the person and to regenerate them and make them another person. And therefore, it's far superior to anything John was able to offer.

He makes the comparison of the wheat and the chaff in verse 17, which we've discussed. Then in verse 18, it says, With many other exhortations he preached to the people, but Herod the Tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Now, Herod Antipas had seduced the wife of his brother Philip.

He had visited his brother once and met the wife and somehow, during his visit, persuaded her to come home with him to Galilee, and she became his wife. John the Baptist, at some point in his ministry, we don't know exactly the chronology of it, but at some point in his ministry, began to pester Herod about that and say that it was unlawful for him to have his brother's wife. And eventually, just out of embarrassment, Herod put him in jail.

Later, he had him executed, as the gospel records tell at a later point, at the behest of

Herodias. Herod himself was kind of a wimpy guy, and although he was embarrassed by John, he was also intimidated by him and was not eager to do anything against him, but Herodias was somewhat more vicious, and she arranged for John's death, as we read at a later point in the gospels. The fact that John spoke about every evil thing that Herod did suggests that there is a prophetic role to criticize government sin, government abuse of power.

Although, of course, he was an Old Testament prophet, not a New Testament one, and therefore it raises questions of application to our own selves, but I do believe the church is to be a prophetic voice in society, and there is a place for the church to criticize government abuse and sin and injustice. We'll talk next time about the baptism of Jesus, but we've run out of time for this session, and so we'll have to take that next time.