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Hard Words to Soften Hard Hearts (Luke 3:1-38)

Introduction – Preaching the gospel contains much more than a soft-sell message and a smile, inviting all to come. Salvation has to do with many things, cleaning up that which is unclean for one. John's message of preparation is a gospel (v18). But salvation does not come without repentance, without judgment, nor without the anointed One. The background has been set (Luke 1-2). The drama now begins. Enter the Son of Adam, the Son of God.

John the Preparer/Jesus the Judge and King (vv1-6) – We have seen throughout the first two chapters of Luke the parallels of John and Jesus. Now we have the two of them present in their formal ministry together. This time Luke dates the timing of this event with regard to both the Israelites (Herod, et al) and the entire world of the Gentiles (Tiberius Caesar, et al). What is taking place will affect Jew and Gentile alike.

A Baptism of Repentance – There were many baptisms (washings) in the Old Covenant (Heb 9:10 speaks of these), and so there is some familiarity of this ritual. Also, Jewish custom required baptism of all Gentile converts, which would actually be an offensive requirement then for the Jew. But John isn't pulling any punches anyway. He is in the wilderness as the prophet had promised (Isaiah 40:3-5 is quoted). Isaiah was predicting Israel's redemption from Babylonian exile. A new Israel is going to pass through the waters of the Jordan to again conquer the land. This baptism is a baptism of preparation for One who is coming for the true remission of sins. The deepest valleys of depravity are not too low to be brought up by and for the Lord. In addition, every mountain of human pride and false glory will be brought low. Salvation has come to the earth, for *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God."* (v6). John's exhortation is for all to come to the waters of repentance and cleansing, for the way of the Lord, the Judge and King of all, is being prepared.

Salvation does not come without repentance

John the Preacher/Jesus the Messiah and Message (vv7-20) – This Judge and His judgment is coming soon, and therefore John's message is one of great urgency. The axe is already at the tree (v9), the winnowing fork is in His hand (v17). Like all the warnings before these recent (and current?) hurricanes, the 'preparer' is preaching a "change of mind" right now.

Preaching With an Edge – God through His messengers shows His hatred of hypocrisy, and He is not afraid to use language with an edge to get His message across. The multitudes are called a *"brood of vipers"* (see also Matt 3:7), that is, they are sons of the devil and not Abraham. They are sons of the serpent and not of the woman. The Pharisees and Sadducees in general were not baptized (see Luke 7:29-30). Meaningless, insincere participation brings nothing but judgment (Isaiah 1:10-17). How much more those of us now in the New Covenant?

The Look of Repentance – *"What shall we do?"* the people ask, *"and even the tax collectors came..."* True repentance has the look of simplicity and could be summed up with Micah 6:8, *"do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."* Share. Don't lie or extort. Don't abuse power. Be content with what God has given you. But notice how repentance looks different for different people with different sins and temptations. You must repent of your own sins, not someone else's.

Baptism With the Holy Spirit and Fire – Once again we see how much greater Jesus is than John. John came baptizing with water, but he is not the Christ (the anointed One). The Messiah is mightier and comes baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Ezek 36:25-26). This is the gospel of salvation, but it is also the gospel of separation – the wheat from the chaff. Fire is a purifier and it is also an awful place of judgment. The King is coming – repent and be saved, or refuse and be burned (and if that is not enough) *"with unquenchable fire."* The Good News is not a Good Option among many options.

Hard Hearts (vv18-19) – Herod knew he was unclean and imprisoned the gospel. What does the hard heart want to do with the message to "repent," to "believe on Jesus," and "to bear fruit worthy of your repentance?" Do you shut John up in prison? Or do you let his word turn you to the living Word – for forgiveness, heart repentance, and transformation?

Salvation does not come without judgment

John the Baptizer/Jesus the Baptized and Son of God (vv21-38) – First of all, notice the three Persons of the Trinity are all present here. And so it was at creation (God, His Word, the Spirit) where the Spirit hovered over the waters. When God recreated the world through Noah, the ark was baptized in water and then a dove was sent out which hovered over Noah. Of all baptized, Jesus was the only One who was sinless and clean.

The Voice From Heaven – When God created the world, each day He said that it was good. On the sixth day, when God created Adam, He said that it was very good. On this day of recreation and identification of the new Adam, God said of His Son, *"...in You I am well pleased."*

Anointed – Having prayed, Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and is anointed High Priest by God the Father. His ministry is now

to begin.

Salvation does not come without the anointed One.

Why Was Jesus Baptized? – All of Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor 10:2). They were associated with him; they were identified with him. Jesus is identifying with us, standing in our place. Why? We can't even get the repentance part down – that's why. And that is why repentance is a gift (Acts 5:31, 11:18). We need to repent even of our repenting. We really are a sorry lot. And so this Suffering Servant came and repented for us. He is the new Adam. He is the new Israel. He is the new creation. He is the new Son of God, not born, but ever-begotten. This Adam is beloved of God. This new anointed One is “well pleasing” in God's sight.

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