

Prepare for the Lord by Producing Fruit

Luke 3:7-18 (NIV)

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." ¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. ¹¹ John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" ¹³ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. ¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay." ¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, "But I'm a member of this church." God can raise up members of this church out of stones if he wanted to. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

You talking to me? Are you talking to me? You must be talking to me because there's no one else here. You calling me a son of a snake? You calling me an offspring of the devil? I just wanted to come to worship. I just wanted to praise God. Now you are calling me a child of Satan. Am I not worthy to be here to hear God's Word? Are you calling my motives into question? Pastor, how can you say those things? Have I not done enough for the church? Is it not enough that I am here today, that I chose to come? Why put me down? Am I really going to burn in the flames of hell? What are you saying here, Pastor?

How do you take John's words here in Luke chapter 3? Can you imagine how you would have felt as one of the people in the crowds that had come out to him to be baptized?

John was there to prepare the way for the Lord and he did so by not pulling any punches. He saw people coming to him, and he knew that some of them were coming in order to be part of a pop culture social trend. It's Matthew's gospel account that tells us that John was directing his comments to the Pharisees and Sadducees that were coming to be baptized. These particular religious factions did not come to John confessing their sins, showing a repentant, changed heart. They were there because the people were there. They followed the crowds. They wanted to be the trendsetters. Their hearts weren't in the right place. For them, it was a show.

Nevertheless, John said those words to the whole crowd. How many of those in attendance reacted as you did as I started the sermon, just flabbergasted, feeling small and judged, hurt, saddened. John's words immediately make me reflect and examine myself. Do I belong to a brood of vipers? Am I an offspring of Satan? Am I deceiving myself coming to be baptized? Am I here because all my friends are here, or am I here for what God's Word has done to me, for me, has said to me? What if I am here for the wrong reasons? Am I really a believer? Am I worthy of God? Will he chop me down and throw me to the unquenchable fires?

Thankfully, John had come "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (verse 3) Those waters that he used to baptize the people combined with the Word of God that had come to him, went to purify those people. Baptism had changed them, caused them to repent. Their hearts had been repaired for the Lord. They were given God's salvation.

We also have received that same baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Those tidal waves of water have swept away the mountains of sins and filled in the dark valleys of our lives. By baptism, we have seen God's salvation as we were purified and made his children. We have been repaired by our baptisms.

But, all this talk about cutting me down, about fire, about a winnowing fork and harvesting wheat gets me worried. Am I producing fruit in keeping with repentance? Am I going to get chopped down? Am I the wheat that the Messiah will gather into his barn or am I the chaff that he will burn with unquenchable fire? How can I know who I am or what I am? Am I producing the right fruit? Because

if I'm not, I'm doomed. I'm headed straight for the fires that do not go out, of which there is no reprieve. I don't want to go down that path. I want to change. I want to avoid it. What should I do then?

The people in the crowd in John's day were having these same thoughts. This is why they immediately asked, "What should we do then?" (verse 10) They want to know. What is this fruit in keeping with repentance? How can I know that I am doing what is right?

John showed them the way, showed them what kind of fruits that they should be producing which were in keeping with their repaired hearts. "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." (verse 11) When the tax collectors asked, John answered, "Don't collect any more than you are required to." (verse 13) Then the soldiers asked and John replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay." (verse 14)

It's so simple. If you have more than what you need, then look for opportunities to give of your wealth, of your clothes, of your food. For the tax collectors, those despised officers of the state, they were told to do their job honestly. Similar advice was given to the soldiers. First of all, you don't need to leave your jobs as if the work you do is evil in and of itself. It's not. Instead, don't use your position to try to satiate your greed. Don't shake people down. Don't harass them by falsely accusing them. Instead, be content with your pay. It's little things that John points to as fruits in keeping with repentance.

So, what will the fruit in keeping with repentance look like in your life? How can you be generous with what God has given you? How can you faithfully do your jobs, your vocations in life?

I've seen the fruit that you have produced in keeping repentance. The somewhat running gag right now is that I keep a messy office when the truth is we don't have enough room under the Christmas tree to put all the gifts that you bought for the children that we are helping through Davis County Family Services. You gave presents to children who otherwise would not have had any presents. You gave so many, in fact, that I can barely walk around my office. Back in August, you gave so many school supplies to E.G. King that the buckets we had then were overflowing! The assistant principal said that we would easily supply the needs of 60 students, probably more. There are many more stories that I could tell, but you produced these fruits not to be praised. You produced them because God had repaired your heart, and this is your expression of thanks to him by helping others.

Producing fruit in keeping with repentance is not just about what you give materially to people. It is about loving your neighbor as yourself. It's about serving others where you can serve. It's about doing your job faithfully, not because you are getting paid to do it, but because you know that faithful work is what God wants you to do.

There are no shortage of opportunities to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. So, we all need to ask ourselves, "Is there more that I can do?" Can I work harder, smarter at my job? Can I be content with what I have to do in my life? Can I be even more generous with what I have? How can I continue to conform my life in service to God?

All these fruits point to the fact that you have been purified by the waters of your baptism. These simple acts means that, yes, God has given me the Holy Spirit. He has repaired my heart. Now, I produce fruit in keeping with that repair. The evidence is there. I need not fear judgment. God will gather me as wheat to his barn and he will not burn me up with unquenchable fire like the chaff.

So I keep producing fruit in keeping with repentance. I give because God has given me more than enough. I do my job faithfully because God has given me the strength and talents to perform this job. I am content because God has repaired me through baptism. I produce fruit in keeping with repentance preparing the way for the Lord to stay in my life. Amen.