

# Luke 3:1-18 - Repentance

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Today I want us to come back to the Gospel of Luke. A few months ago we spent a few weeks working our way through chapters 1 and 2 and I want us today to resume looking at the Gospel of Luke and to pick things up in chapter 3 and as I said to the children we are going to be focusing today on the message of John the Baptist and we can read again at the beginning verse 3 verses in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea and Herod being Tetrach of Galilee and his brother Philip Tetrach of the region of Ithidia and Thraconatus and Lysanius Tetrach of Abelene during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas the word of God came to John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness and he went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Now chapters 1 and 2 in the Gospel of Luke are very much setting the scene they give us a huge amount of information and it took us quite a number of weeks to get through these two chapters but all of that information is in many ways preliminary information. We read about the experiences of Mary and Elizabeth we read about the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus and at the end of chapter 2 we learn a little bit about Jesus' childhood and in all of that Luke has got one great aim he wants us to be certain he wants us to be certain about everything that he's been saying certain that his words are reliable and true he wants us to be certain that God's plans are being fulfilled and he wants us to be certain that God has provided a saviour who is going to bring peace and salvation. So we have all this wonderful background information then when we come to chapter 3 we jump forward about 30 years to the next crucial moment in history the start of John the Baptist's ministry and Luke gives a very specific time as to when it when it was commenced and his readers would have known exactly when this was and we know from history that this was probably around AD 29 or 30. John's ministry has begun and the vital question in all of that is what was John's message? He's a great messenger he has come to tell the people what God wants them to hear what is it that he was saying what was John's message? Well the answer is given to us in verse 3 we are told that he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and I want us today to focus on the key word in that statement the word repentance.

John's message was all about repentance. So first of all if we're going to look at this we have to ask the question what does repentance mean? It's one of these words that we've probably hear many many times when we come to church and one that we may be familiar with but we've got to be really certain that we know what it means and at the heart of the idea of repentance is the concept of turning round or changing direction.

Repentance is all about if you're going one way you turn and go the other way it's all about a change a turning round a change of direction. Now this involves both an outward and an inward aspect and this is reflected by the language that's used for repentance. In Greek the word for repentance basically means to change your mind and that's a key part of repentance it's a change in your way of thinking a change in your attitude a new frame of mind so that's got that inward aspect but the Hebrew word for repentance basically means to return which is more like a sort of outward thing you stop going one way and you turn back so it's inward and outward a change in your life and a brilliant example of that is the prodigal son.

If you remember the prodigal son he went away from his father and he went down an awful path and ended up in a mess and in the depths of his despair he came to himself and we see that his thinking changed and he then got up and returned so he changed inwardly he changed outwardly his life was transformed and it's really important that we understand that repentance is not just saying sorry it's not just saying that we regret our sins it is saying that we are turning from them we are abandoning them we are going to go God's way and a great summary of that is in the catechism question 87 what is repentance unto life repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ that's an inward thing through sense apprehension doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience change of mind change of our ways a transformation in our lives now this is really important and really interesting because people often say Christians don't like change and worst of all as the free church apparently we don't like change people often say that that's people's caricature of Christians or Christianity that we don't like change now that is possibly true in certain contexts but spiritually it is absolutely not true because we love change and Christianity is all about change change in people's lives transformation in people's lives when your life has was going one way and it was going a way that was downhill Christianity brings an amazing change an amazing transformation and every

Christian in here can testify to that not one of us would say oh I would rather go back to him my life once when we came to Christ our lives changed and they changed brilliantly so Christians love change repentance is about us turning away from the wrong path and changing our lives and as individuals and as a church we want to keep on changing in ways that will make us more and more like Jesus and this is why repentance is one of the most important words that we can ever ever hear because I I know that not one of us would would be of the view that the world doesn't need to change we have seen all sorts of chaos in the last few weeks and you look at the world and you look at the news and year after year after year things are just the same and the world needs to change because there is a lot wrong with it and it is only the gospel it is only the power of Jesus

[ 7 : 58 ] Christ that can make that change both for us as individuals and for the whole world and so that's what repentance means a change of mind a change of life a wholehearted turning to God and that's what John's message was he was calling everybody to repent and as we look at this chapter together well at the first half of this chapter we can learn three vital lessons about repentance and I want us just to spend a wee bit of time looking at these together the first thing that we learn is that repentance is essential repentance is absolutely essential now when you think of John the Baptist always remember that John was the last of the Old Testament prophets in the Old Testament you had a long line of prophets who proclaimed mess God's message to the people

John is the last one of these and Jesus himself said that all the law and the prophets prophesied until John and if you look at at the start of the chapter Luke introduces the chapter in a very Old Testament prophet kind of way when he was saying in the year of tiberias sees it etc etc if you go back to an Old Testament prophet like Haggai you see the same thing in the second year of Darius the king in the sixth month the first day of the month the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shiahthi you see the similarity Luke is introducing John the Baptist in exactly the same way as the Old Testament prophets were often introduced John is the last of the Old Testament prophets now those of you who were here last week we were saying that the Old Testament prophets all had a two-fold message they had a message of judgment on the one hand and a message of salvation on the other they were warning the people who were going away from God but at the same time they were offering a wonderful message of hope and salvation to those who would return to God when you think of the Old Testament prophets always think judgment and salvation and John is exactly the same he has a message of judgment and a message of salvation now I want you to picture the scene for a moment in your minds John was out in the wilderness but crowds and crowds of people went out to hear him they were desperate to hear what John was saying now

I often imagine that if you imagine somebody going out into the middle of the pentland road to start proclaiming a message none of us would go to hear them but that's what it was like John was in the middle of nowhere but people went to hear him and what's even more remarkable is that the message they were going out to hear was incredibly solemn and in many ways it was almost a severe message the crowds were going out you'd think they were going out to hear you're something really encouraging but we read in Luke that it was a very very severe message he said to them you brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come bear fruits in keeping with repentance and do not begin to say to yourself we have Abraham as our father for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham even now the axe laid to the root of the trees every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire and the reason that John gave them this message is was because the people who were coming out to hear him were not how God wanted or required them to be their lives were not what they should be and they were liable to judgment John's message was a stern warning these people were not how they were meant to be and the key point that this is emphasizing is that repentance presupposes the fact that something is seriously wrong repentance is presupposing the fact that something is wrong and first and foremost the gospel message is not a message which says everything is fine the gospel message is not the starting point of the gospel is not everyone's fine there's nothing wrong the gospel message begins with the fact that there is something seriously wrong with us that's why we have the gospel message that's why we have good news because our natural situation is one of bad news and it is vital vital that we do not underestimate the seriousness of that Romans 3 10 sums it up when it says no one is righteous no not one now that is the most solemn and most serious message that the world will ever hear and we must must not underestimate that we must not think that doesn't apply to me the no not one means that applies to me and to every one of us and so repentance presupposes that something is seriously wrong and that is why repentance is utterly essential repentance is utterly essential and John is highlighting that point in this passage in verse 8 he was saying to them don't think that that your heritage your history the fact that you are Abraham's descendants is going to save you I was going to put verse 8 on the screen but I didn't and verse 8 says do not say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father these people thought well because we have all this history in the Old Testament because we have all of this heritage we're fine John was saying don't think like that and that is still a very very easy mistake to make it's easy to think well I've got a good heritage or there's good things in my past or things aren't too bad with me or whatever John's message is that heritage or history or status will not excuse us

from judgment in fact John is saying judgment will come that's what he means when he says the axe is at the root of the trees and if you are trusting in Jesus then you are safe perfectly safe but if you are not yet trusting in Jesus then you are in a desperately serious condition without Jesus we are going the wrong way without Jesus we are on the path that leads to judgment we are heading in an awful direction and that is why turning around repenting is absolutely essential essential now I am not exaggerating when I say that this is the most important thing that you will ever ever hear because you do not have to understand every detail of the Bible to become a Christian far from it and indeed we never will there is so much for us to learn but you have got to make sure that you understand this that we must turn to God in repentance we must turn from this path that we are on and turn to him repentance is essential can't be a Christian without repentance it's absolutely essential John's message was a message of judgment like the Old Testament prophets but

John's message was also a message of salvation the Old Testament prophets had this twofold message and this is where we see the second key lesson about repentance it's not just essential it is available repentance is available now it's really really interesting when you look at this passage as we said all these people went out to John and they heard a really really harsh message John pulled no punches he gave them an incredibly solemn warning and yet verse 18 tells us that he preached good news it was a harsh message but it was good news because that is exactly what they needed to hear John is not just telling them that repentance is essential he's also telling them that repentance is available and he went through all the region of Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance he is telling them all that repentance is available and in fact that was what John's job was to be he was to tell everybody that salvation was coming and that repentance is available his own father prophesied about it in chapter one you child will be called the prophet of the most high you go before the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins that was John's message not just that repentance is essential but that repentance is available and we have to remember this John is telling people to repent and that means we need to repent but thank god it also means that we can repent we can repent now I don't know about you all but when I look back at my life and when I think of some of the worst moments of my life when I think of some of the things that I regret the most it's when I have hurt other people and I'm sure you all feel the same you think back to to when you've done something maybe completely unintentionally but you've hurt somebody maybe even all the way back in school or or wherever it may be where you've hurt somebody and when you're in that situation it's awful because you you feel so full of regret so full of sorrow and you wish that you could do something about it and and we see that in our own lives and you see it maybe on the news you look at some on the news you see somebody who's done a desperate crime and sometimes you see criminals who have no remorse at all and for them there's no hesitation to punish them but sometimes you look on the news and you see somebody who has done something and it has left them utterly broken you see people and they are devastated because of what they've done and they wish they could undo it they wish they could do something but they can't it's done they might be desperately sorry but they can't repent of it they can't change their direction they're going to be punished and no matter how broken somebody is in a law court their punishment will come and this can happen to us in relation to our fellow human beings but it also can and should happen to us in relation to God when we look at ourselves when we see that we have sinned against God we realize that we have hurt God we realize how serious our sin is and this is what is often called

[ 20 : 44 ] conviction of sin where we realize just how much we have gone wrong where we realize how good God has been to us and how much we have let him down and and we feel convicted and devastated by our sin and it's an incredibly hard thing to experience and that was the experience of David when he wrote Psalm 51 I know my transgressions my sin is ever before me against you you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment the whole psalm speaks of David's utter sorrow at his sinfulness and that's what John's hearers experienced they were conscious of their sin and they were going up to John and they were saying what shall we do and this is where we see why the gospel is so amazing because John does not say you're too late John does not say the damage is beyond repair don't John does not say there is no hope for you John says repent and John says that because you can repent repentance is available and that should fill us with so much joy because when you think of the seriousness of sin and when you think of the fact that the world is in a mess and we are caught up in that mess and everything can seem so hopeless God is saying that hope has not gone because you can repent and the reason you can repent is because God is merciful God wants to forgive you God wants you to be saved and in fact that's why Jesus came to make all of this available to do all that was necessary so that we can be saved now this is incredibly important for anybody here who feels that they are too far gone often people feel like that in relation to God they think I'm too far gone my chance has gone and I've I've mucked it up too many times I am telling you today and Luke chapter 3 is telling you today that it does not matter how many mistakes you have made you can repent today and it does not matter how many opportunities you have let slip by you can repent today and it doesn't matter how many times you have let God down or let yourself down or how far you feel that you are such a failure you can repent today there are no exceptions to that no exceptions you can repent today the Lord is gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and that should fill us with joy that God has not abandoned us not forgotten us but he is opening his arms out to you and to all of us and saying you can repent today that should fill us with joy but it should also fill us with a sense of urgency because you can repent today but who knows what tomorrow will bring for any of us it should fill us with a sense of urgency so repentance is essential we must do it repentance is available we can do it you can do it but thirdly and finally we see from this chapter

that repentance is wonderful and I really want us to try and see this the absolute wonder of repentance and in particular repentance brings two wonderful wonderful things the first is that repentance brings real change and John emphasizes this when he says in verse 10 bear fruits in keeping with repentance he is saying that repentance must bring a real change in our lives it brings fruits in our lives that's what we mean when we say it's an inward and an outward reality it has an effect on our lives a brilliant effect on our lives and that's why in this chapter he gives very specific instructions to the people who came to him various groups came to him and said what shall we do and he gave them very clear instructions the crowd asked him what shall we do he answered them whoever has two tunics to share is to share with him who has none and whoever has food is to do likewise tax collectors also came through baptize and said to him what shall we do and he said collect no more than your authorized to do soldiers asked him what shall we do and he said to them do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be content with the wages that you have John is saying that the repentance which is symbolized in the baptism they were receiving is to have a real effect in their lives it's not just a case of saying I repent I'm going to get John to baptize me and then I'm just going to carry on doing what I was doing John is saying there should be a real change it's about turning around turning away from sin and striving to follow God's ways and John is saying to all these people to the crowds to the tax collectors to the soldiers if you are repenting you are to live differently as a result of that they are to stop abusing people around them they are starting there to start showing love to their neighbor they are to start doing what is right now this is really really important because it's telling us that repentance is only ever a genuine reality if it's not genuine it's not repentance now this is really important in regard to an objection that people often raise sometimes you hear non-Christians looking at at those who have gone from a very evil life and who have come to faith and they think that person was far worse than me and they've become a Christian what's all that about and people can seem very very confused by that but for anybody to become a Christian their repentance has to be 100 genuine and if somebody is converted from from a real depth of evil it is only because they bitterly regret everything that they've done and they genuinely wholeheartedly repent of their sin repentance is only ever a genuine reality and this is one of the reasons why

Christianity has changed the world for the better because it has transformed people's lives we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ but that saving relationship has an effect so that we live differently and the influence of that new way of life has had an amazing amazing effect on the world and and today it's very sad because we forget that so many of the things that are a pillar of our society are there because of the Christian influence over hundreds and hundreds of years equality for women faithfulness in marriage social morality education for everyone and anyone compassion for the needy these are all fundamental pillars of our society and if it wasn't for the Christian gospel we would have none of them now how do we know that well you look at places in the world where Christianity is missing and all of these other things are missing too the influence of Christianity has been astonishing and we must must must remember that repentance is wonderful because it brings real genuine necessary change and this is emphasizing the vital truth that God can change things for you

God can change things for you that was one of the amazing things about the road to recovery meetings we had over the past week you had people standing up and speaking people's whose lives were in a desperate mess and God had changed things for them and that is God's work and God can change things for you and now it may not be that you are suffering with with a terrible addiction like many people are it may be that you are struggling with stress it may be that you are struggling with worry it may be that you feel lonely it may be that you are terrified of death it may be that you feel that life is empty and purposeless whatever it is God can change things for you because if you turn to him in repentance then you will find that something wonderful that comes into your life now that doesn't mean that life is always easy and it doesn't mean that you'll never make a mistake again because we all make mistakes and life is still hard but the wonderful things it means is that instead of going the wrong way you are going the right way and that changes your life in an amazing way repentance brings real change and as Christians we must always seek to bear the fruits of repentance in our lives we never ever think to yourself oh well

I've prayed a prayer and God saved me therefore it doesn't matter how I live my life that is not Christianity Christianity is a turning from sin and a following after God living according to his word and serving him bearing fruit in our lives that's the first wonderful thing about repentance it brings real change but secondly repentance brings forgiveness repentance brings forgiveness that was John's message he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins now this is really really wonderful because when you repent you are turning back to God as we're saying this is the big theme of repentance you turn around but the wonderful thing is that when you turn back you do not have to go back up the path you are on now I've thrown a wee picture to help demonstrate this right here we have the path that we are all born on the downward path of sin I've called it we sin it takes us further and further and further away from God we are all slipping down that path whether we realize it or not we fall down the path of sin if we are without

[ 32 : 36 ] Christ and we end up on that path and the destination is is horrific repentance turns you around you turn around and you start going in a different direction but when you turn around you do not have to work your way back up that path in other words you don't have to make up for every sin that you committed you don't have to repair every mistake that you've made you don't have to earn God's favor by undoing everything that you've done wrong Jesus has done that for you Jesus died on the cross to undo the damage of your sin so when you turn back you don't have to work your way back up to try and hopefully reach God one day that's what Islam will tell you and many other religions that you've got to work your way back up to God but Christianity will not tell you that because that is not our message you do not have to work your way back up that path when you repent when you turn around instead of having to do that you go on to a new path we are taken from where we were and we are placed on a new way Jesus has done everything we have to do our sins are forgiven and all the hurt and all the pain has been healed the Greek word for repentance basically means to release or to send away and that's exactly what repentance does it releases you from the power and the guilt of sin it sends all of your sin to the cross where Jesus paid the price and where Jesus took our punishment on our behalf and we are set free and that is what God is saying to you today that if you feel sin is clutching you and pulling you down and burdening you and binding you God is saying repent and you will be released repent and you will be set free if you are burdened by sin if you are fearful of judgment if you know that you need to get things right with God then this is what you have to do you have to repent you tell God that you are sorry for your sins you tell God that you want to follow him and you tell God that it is only because of Jesus Christ that you are going to do that and it is on the basis of his death and his resurrection nothing in our hands we bring simply to the cross weakling and the result is that you will be released you will be forgiven you will be saved and it is the most wonderful thing that we can ever experience repentance is essential repentance is available repentance is wonderful we all know what we need amen let us pray