

Baptism of repentance (Luke 3:1-38)

We have been studying the Gospel of Luke together. Today, we will study the theme “baptism of repentance” from cp. 3.

1. Obstacles to salvation

v.1-2

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

At the beginning of his book, Luke showed that he was writing based on his careful investigation, what he was describing is historical facts. It is not a story made up by human beings, nor a legend which we don't know where it is from. Here, he mentions some of governors' names and which year it was. Before he describes what had actually happened, Luke gives us precise time and places where these incidents happened. Luke is saying "This is reference, you can check it."

v.3

³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

This was John's central message to prepare the way for Jesus. It is also the main message today to prepare people's hearts for Jesus. Some people want to hear a 'man-centered' and 'user-friendly' gospel. But we see John preaching about repentance for the remission of sins. If the gospel does not deal with the issue of sin and repentance, then we have failed to preach the gospel. The "Good News" is meaningless without the context of the bad news. The bad news is that we are all sinners by nature and there is nothing we can do to save

ourselves. We must recognize not only our 'sins' but also our fundamental sin nature which separates us from God. We must turn from our own ways so that we can come to Jesus.

v.4-6

⁴ As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. ⁶ And all mankind will see God's salvation.' "

This is what is written in the book of Isaiah. Here it lists up 4 things that hinder people from seeing God's salvation. *Every valley, every mountain and hill, the crooked places, the rough ways.* When these problems are solved, all people will see the salvation of God. In other words, these problems hinder people from seeing God's salvation.

Then, what are those 4 obstacles in reality? I understand this way.

- ① Every valley. That is inferiority. I am inferior to that person in this area. I can't do it, I'm no good.
- ② Every mountain and hill. That is pride. I can do this, I have that, and I have done this or that. People must treat me this way or that way.
- ③ The crooked places. That is the heart that can't receive things straight, can't see things straight, thinking that there must be something behind that.
- ④ The rough ways. Let's think about a road. Where the ground is leveled, and paved with asphalt, we can move forward smoothly. But where the asphalt comes off and soil comes out, the road is rough and we can't move forward easily. I apply this to our heart, this is our lack of understanding of the good news and ourselves. We think we know ourselves well. But actually many of us still don't know who we are, why we feel this way, why we react that way... For some part, we understand

very well, so we move forward smoothly. But for other parts, because we lack understanding, we cannot move forward, and we have to stop.

These elements keep us away from God's salvation. Because of these elements inside us, we cannot receive God's salvation into some places in our lives.

v.7

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?"

This is a shocking word! John was NOT talking to the people who were sinning. He was talking to the people who came to be baptized. They heard John's message and came to be baptized. But their heart attitude was wrong.

Now, let's continue to look at what John said to the people.

2. Fruits worthy of repentance

v.7-8 (NKJ)

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?" ⁸ 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.

People understood through John's message that they were sinners. They understood that they deserve God's wrath. They were trying to flee from God's wrath. So they came to be baptized.

So, John says, "Who taught you to do that? If you understand you deserve God's wrath, and repent and want to be baptized, you should be bearing fruits worthy of repentance."

Here, we want to pay attention to the fact that if we truly repent, we will bear fruits worthy of repentance.

When someone comes to Jesus, their life changes. We don't change our lives in order to come to Jesus, but when we do come to Him there are signs of a new life, and these 'fruits worthy of repentance' should be the mark of the Christian. Too many people want to justify themselves by claiming affiliation with a person, a family, a church, or a denomination, like they said "We have Abraham as *our* father." Here, John says it doesn't work that way.

Luke gives three examples of fruits of repentance.

① The people (the crowd) v.10-11

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. ¹¹ John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Until that point, they had thought they were the ones who needed to receive. But, when they repented, they became those who shared and gave.

② Tax collectors v.12-13

¹² Tax collectors also 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).

Until that point, they had justified their evil deeds, making excuses. But, when they repented, they started to do what was right, what they needed to do.

③ The soldiers v.14

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."

Until that point, they had satisfied themselves by accusing someone who was weaker than themselves. But when they repented, they became content with what they have and what they were given.

When someone repents, his life changes. We cannot flee from God's wrath by doing good. But when someone repents, his life changes. When we repent, we bear fruits worthy of repentance.

"The gospel not only infuses people with new life and gives them a capacity to work honestly and save for a more ordered and comfortable life, but it transforms the social conscience, so that believers gladly learn to share with the needy."¹

v.8-9

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."

God can raise up children to Abraham from stones. Even those who are called "brood of vipers", who deserve God's wrath, if they repent, God can change them. But for those who do not repent, God's wrath will remain on them forever.

3. Two responses of people who heard John's message

Luke mentions Two responses of people who heard John's message.

① Herod v.18-20

¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. ¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

Herod had power. He could get anything he wanted. He could do anything he wanted. But, when he heard the Gospel, he didn't repent. And he

¹ Escobar, Samuel, *A Time For Mission*, IVP, 2003, pp153-154

added another evil to all the evils he had done. He was a ruler in the society. But actually he was a slave of sin.

Those who don't repent when they hear the Gospel are actually slaves of sin, no matter how high their position in the society is. They may be able to get anything they want, they may be able to do anything they want, but actually they are slaves of sin.

② Jesus v.21-22

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Luke simply recorded that Jesus was baptized. And what happened to Jesus? The Holy Spirit descended upon Him. And he heard a voice which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Imagine that you are in the place of those who were there at that time. Most people in those days still didn't know who Jesus was. People might see that Jesus was also a sinner like themselves. They must have thought Jesus had also repented of his sin and was baptized.

After this incident, Luke recorded the genealogy of Jesus. The genealogy connects Jesus to Adam and to God, thus to all humanity, and again restates that Adam was the first man God created.

Luke recorded Jesus as a representative of us, all human beings. When someone repents, the Holy Spirit will descend on them. And they can hear a voice which says, "You are My beloved child; in You I am well pleased."

It is not because of doing good or doing great work. But when we repent, we will be persons who are worthy to be said, "You are My beloved child; in You I am well pleased." And we can receive the word at face value. God truly accepts us as his children.

Before, no matter how many times we were told, "You are My beloved child; in You I am well pleased," we could not receive the word as it is. There

were some obstacles in our hearts which hindered us from receiving the word. Inferiority and pride hindered us from receiving the word. Our heart could not receive the word straight, and because of lack of understanding we couldn't understand the meaning very well.

But when we repent, God's gracious mighty work begins in us, that every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. In order to see God's salvation, we need repentance. When we repent, the obstacles in us will be removed one by one. We will be released from the past. We are now experiencing God's salvation. And through us, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

4. A baptism of repentance

Finally, what is a baptism of repentance?

v.8-9

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."

Let's keep this in our mind and look at another verse.

John 15:4-6

⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

A baptism of repentance is not just to take a water baptism with repentance, rather to start living our life, abiding in Jesus, no matter what our previous life was like.

It is not to imitate Jesus and try to do things like Jesus. It is not trying hard by ourselves to observe Jesus' teachings like following rules. But it is to abide in Jesus, to soak ourselves in Jesus, to let Jesus soak through us. And Jesus lives in us.

Luke 3:16-17

¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with 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."

The English word "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo." Baptizo means to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet) and comes from the root word "bapto", meaning to cover wholly with a fluid, as in "dip." For example, when you dye a piece of white cloth red, you soak the white cloth into red water. This "soaking" is "baptizo".

When we repent we start living our life, abiding in Jesus, no matter what our previous life was like. It is like... we soak ourselves from head to toe in Jesus. Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. That is, He will soak through us. But we have to accept Him. We need to let Him do it.

And if you let him, He will also clean out our hearts, and gather rubbish, garbage, obstacles from our hearts into His barn, so that we can experience God's salvation in our gut level. But we must allow Him to do it.

Jesus was misunderstood by people even before he was born. People thought he was born through sin. Right after his birth, he was marked for death. He was rejected. He never told a lie, but he was called a liar. He always taught the truth,

but he was thought to be someone who misled people. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, but he was called a demon-possessed. He was betrayed and envied by people. He was treated as a criminal for no good reason. He was considered to be cursed.

These are all the pains we, human beings would experience on this earth. Jesus took all these pains for our sake. But for this to become reality in our lives, we need to soak ourselves in Him and let Him soak through us.

John 15:4-6

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

When we repent we start living our life, abiding in Jesus, no matter what our previous life was like. Repentance is not one- time religious action, but it's the beginning of a new life. Repentance is a life style. And we will experience Him throughout the rest our lives.

Today we have studied about “baptism of repentance.” It is to soak ourselves from head to toe in Jesus and let Him soak through us. It is not to make us wet a little bit on the head. It's not just head knowledge or the mere word, but it's a life style.

When we repent we start living our life, abiding in Jesus. It is to live our life, soaked in Jesus, with Jesus soaking through us. In other words, the Holy Spirit will work on 4 obstacles in you. He deals with your mind, thought, emotion and memory which hinder you from grace, one by one.

If you abide in Jesus, you don't have to suffer from your past pain, whatever it was. Because He took them all.

If you abide in Jesus, you can always hear the voice of God, “You are My beloved child; in You I am well pleased.” And you can see yourself as the word says.

And If you abide in Jesus, you will be filled with the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit living in you, you can naturally live a worthy life as God's beloved, and God's joy.