

Luke 3:1-14 – The Preaching of John the Baptist

God keeps every one of his promises and fulfils every one of his purposes. The greatest promise was that one day a Saviour would come to save God's people from sin, death and hell. The people of God waited for thousands of years – but at last, the day came. But before his coming, God promised someone to prepare the way (Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6). That someone was John the Baptist, going ahead of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we reach Luke chapter 3, John the Baptist is no longer a promise, or a baby or boy. He was a grown man, and God's time had fully arrived.

1. John's ministry (v1-6)

Luke tells us the exact time in history, and who were the rulers. The coming of Jesus was the most important event that ever happened, so Luke recorded it accurately for us. The Word of God did not come to any of these great and powerful men, but to John in the wilderness. They were all bypassed, as a sign of God's displeasure with them. The nation was still in deep sin, and so God's Word came to an outsider in a remote place to show them this. John came to call them back, telling them to repent so they could be forgiven (v3). This was all as was prophesied (v4-6). John's work was to make the people ready, to put things right for the Lord's coming. Are you seriously seeking the Lord?

2. John's preaching of repentance (v3-9)

John preached repentance and forgiveness (v3). He preached about God's anger and God's mercy. He told them to flee from the coming wrath (v7), but also about a great salvation (v6). When God comes, he comes to judge and to save. e.g. at the Flood, the ungodly world perished, and godly Noah was saved. At the cross of Jesus, sin was judged, and God's people were delivered. John warned the people not to rely on their religious privileges, being in Abraham's family (v8). They thought that God could not judge them, but he could. They needed to make sure their repentance was real, not just trying to escape punishment (v7). It was useless to be baptised unless they had the reality inside them. The time was short (v9) – the axe was at the root, ready to be lifted to strike. Christ's coming was near and they needed to decide if they would accept him or not.

3. Repentance that is real (v10-14)

Repentance must have fruits (v8), otherwise it is not real. These fruits must be in day-to-day life. In verses 11-14, John explained what repenting really meant for different people. For people in general, it means turning away from meanness and greed, and sharing with our neighbours. This was not just for the rich, but for everyone with anything that could be used by someone in need. He told the tax collectors to repent of greed and corruption. He told the soldiers not to abuse their position, but to be content with their wages – and those wages were not high. Are you a person who has repented? Do you live in kindness and contentment, not mis-treating others? Our country is full of ungodly, dishonest and lazy living – have you repented of those things? Is your life different from day to day? John called upon people to deal seriously with God. Are you doing that today?