

“Spiritual Productivity” Luke 3:1-20

Intro: Page ____ **Luke 3:1-22.** Story from my week this week. Inbox chillin on zero... We all want productivity... “Getting Things Done...” Tasks lists. Things to do. Things not to do...

Productivity equals accomplishment, success, sometimes notoriety, promotions, and certainly a sense of self-satisfaction. So we get up early, and stay up late. We often work a little or a lot late, so that we can excel. Advance. Progress.

Productivity can become our obsession. We become consumed with the bottom line, whatever that bottom line may be. What about you? Politicians want to produce votes. Artists want to produce masterpieces. What about you? What do you want to produce? Perhaps the better question for us to consider this morning is this: what does God want us to produce? Luke 3 tells us that God wants us to . . .

The Point: Produce the fruit of godliness through a life of repentance.

Verses 1-6. Context: Ministry of John the Baptist was foretold... He was a prophet of old... The last to come before the ministry of Messiah. Luke provides the historical setting for John’s ministry in verse 1. Consequently, and more importantly, he sets the context for the ministry of Jesus. In verse 2, we have the all important announcement: *“the word of the God came to John”*

- This is how God’s prophets were introduced throughout the OT. The word of the Lord came to Samuel, to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, to Ezekiel, to Jonah, Haggai, Micah, Zechariah, Malachi. And now once again God has a special message for his people.
- It had been roughly 460 years since God had spoken through the prophet Malachi (the last book in our OT), and people familiar with the OT, particularly the book of Isaiah, would know God was up to something huge because they were waiting for a prophet in the wilderness to proclaim the coming salvation of God. Quoting Isaiah 40, Luke explains in verses 4-6:
- *“The voice of one crying... (all good preaching) Prepare the way... Make his paths straight. “Every valley shall be filled....”* “This is a poetic way of saying that the way for the Messiah will be expedited.”
- Pic: I’m all about straight paths, and expedited routes. Some of you may suffer from this condition as well.
- When I need to get somewhere, I pull up Google Maps, but it’s not enough to get three routes and trust the quickest. I have further calculations to compute. What will the traffic be like? Can I cut through a couple of side streets? How many traffic lights and rotaries will I have to sit through? Etc. etc.
- Check v.6: John is preparing the way for Jesus so that, *“all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*
- Again, this is for everyone! Everyone needs to hear John’s message. I don’t care what your background is, how checkered your past may be, how unworthy you feel before God, how much you may be skeptical about the value of embracing Christ with your life. The good news is: God desires that all people, including you, embrace the salvation he extends through Christ.
- So John is crying out to people: “Whatever stands in your way from seeing Christ, annihilate it!” Is that strong enough? What is standing in your way?

TRANS: So how exactly was John going to prepare the way for Jesus? He did so through preaching a straightforward message of repentance. Through this narrative on the ministry of John the Baptist, I want to take you on a theological journey of sorts on the doctrine of repentance and how we can live a productive and pleasing life before God. The first truth I want us to see is that...

I. A productive spiritual life begins with genuine repentance (3:1-9).

- Let’s back up to **Verse 3** and then move forward. “And he went... proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” I will explain more about the distinctions between the baptism of John and the coming baptism of Jesus, but for now we need to understand that John was calling people to repent and asked them to express it through the initiatory act of baptism.
- Now **verses 7-8.**
- John just tells it like it is. This is part of why he drew comparisons to the prophet Elijah in the OT (1 Kings 18ff). He would have gotten along well with Bostonians. John did not wear a perpetual smile on his face nor did he hand out a bunch of roses before he preached, not that the gospel fails to bring joy. It’s just that eternal destinies were at stake. There is nothing more weighty and serious than where people stand before God, and at times, the message needs to be direct with the sound of alarm.
- The heart of his message is found in verse 8. What is exactly is repentance?
- The notion of genuine repentance tells us that there is such thing as false repentance...

Repentance is not...

Simply feeling sorry.

- We can feel sorry about something, but never change. This is what Paul calls “worldly sorrow” in 1 Cor. 10. There is a huge difference in worldly sorry and godly sorry. With worldly sorrow we feel bad, sorrowful over our sin, often times because our sin makes us look bad in the sight of others. With godly sorrow we feel bad, sorrowful over our sin because we have offended the truth, beauty, and goodness of God, and we know that our sin makes him look bad in that it distorts his glory, and thus, it moves us to change.

Behavior Modification

- *God is not interested in religious conformity* that does not flow from a changed heart.
- Repentance is something altogether different than behavior modification and external righteousness.
- A person can look really beautiful and pristine on the outside, while being a spiritual wreck on the inside.
- Religion looks to our performance for spiritual acceptability, but genuine repentance in the gospel looks to Christ’s performance on our behalf.
- John seeks to rattle the foundations of their misguided trust. He warned them not to put false hope in their pedigree, as if God was pleased with them because of who their parents were. The Israelites were proud of their ancestry and assumed because they were connected with the covenant promises, that they were good spiritually.
- We do this as well. Listen, Your parents may have brought up in church. Your parents may have been believers, but that does not make you a child of God. There has to be a personal response from each person. No one will ride to heaven on the coattails of someone else’s faith.
- Why do you have confidence before God? Is it because someone in your family is a Christian? (I get in with them...) Is it because you’ve tried to be a good person or can talk a good game when it comes to the church? You may be able to speak Christianese (You know I was praying in great intercession after reading 2 Chronicles 18 about King Jehoshaphat, and the Spirit started speaking to me about the need to mortify the flesh because that would more properly reflect Paul’s pneumatology in Romans 8) but that will never bring you salvation. Salvation is found in Christ alone.

Trans: So if simply being sorry, or modifying one’s behavior does not cut it, then what is genuine repentance?

Genuine repentance involves a change of mind that leads to turning from sin to life in Christ. So... Repentance involves...

a change of mind

- The word “repentance” in the NT most directly refers to a “change of mind.” Repentance involves a change of mind that leads to a change of action, and consequently, a change of one’s life.
- An incessant battle rages for the devotion of your mind.
- Doctrine of Renewed Thinking...(Rom 1/Rom 12) Believe the gospel fervently enough...

Thomas Watson’s ingredients that are present inwardly and outwardly in true repentance:

- **Sight of sin** – see it
- **Sorrow for sin** – deeply sorry. We regret we deviated from God’s plan
- **Confession of sin** – so we confess it to others and feel a proper...
- **Shame for sin** – we know that our sin has dishonored our God. This is what moves us to have a
- **Hatred for sin** – “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” (Rom 12:9) Do you hate sin? b/c when we do, we...
- **Turn from sin.**

turning from sin..

- So repentance is not simply seeing it, being sorry, confessing it, being shamed by it, and even hating it. Repentance involves turning from it.
- I’m done with that. I’m dead to that. God, by your grace, I am not going back. Why is this so crucial?
- Because to turn from sin is to turn from destruction: **Look back at verse 7.**
- “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”
 - Vipers: a general term for poisonous snakes in Israel.
 - Seed of the serpent (3:15); their father (John 8?)
- Wrath refers to God’s holy anger and judgment against all sin.
- **Verse 9.** “Every tree...” John is calling for personal decisions. Only the unfruitful need to worry about this. So we ask, “who are the unfruitful?” That’s easy. The unrepentant.
- **Pic:** First time in Boston... Turn or Burn Street Evangelist (He was very reserved and non-threatening, but his message was in your face... That may not be the most appropriate method for getting the gospel out, but when you boil it down, it’s accurate.
- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was asked what he would say if he had one opportunity to speak to someone on his deathbed: “Flee to Christ, and escape the wrath to come.”

- Verse 9: “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore...” There should be a sense of urgency to our pursuit of the kingdom of God and the way of Christ, because judgment will come quickly. If our lives do not bear fruit to God’s glory, then we will show that we never had life in him and [will taste the second death...]

Trans: Repentance: “turning from sin.” Yes. but that’s not all. We reduce the gospel to “stop it.” What a sorry message if all we had to say was “Stop it.” If all I had to give you was a set of rules and regulations, I’d quit. Here’s the good news: Repentance is not simply turning from sin; it is also...

turning to Christ.

- **RHC Statement of Faith** – Article X – “Repentance”
- **“Repentance is a gift of God, wherein a person being by the Holy Spirit, made sensible of the manifold evil of his sin, humbles himself for it, with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrence, [notice this last statement] with a purpose and endeavor to walk before God so as to please Him in all things (Acts 2:37-38; 11:18; 2 Cor. 7:10-11).”**
- Why is repentance so important? Because realigning our lives with God, most importantly, brings us back into a right relationship with God. It is the path “to walk before God so as to please Him in all things.” To state it negatively: to fail to genuinely repent is to fail to please God.

II. A productive spiritual life flows from continual repentance (3:10-14).

- In other words, genuine repentance should be practiced continually!
- Repentance is an every day thing that results in every day transformation.
- Luther’s first thesis statement in his famous 95 theses that sparked the Reformation says: **“1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said “Repent” [in Matthew 4:17], willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”**
- Look at **verses 10-14:**
- What then shall we do? A key response to hearing the truth! (Acts 2:37ff)
 - Crowds: love of neighbor...
 - Tax collectors: were notoriously dishonest (hit something political from the debates...)
 - Soldiers: be content
- A fruitful life is displayed in everyday life (vocation; unique opportunities to glorify God.)
- To go back to last week’s sermon on finding our identity in Christ.. It’s not that we may not be identified by our work, but first and foremost we should want to be identified as Christians because if Christ has changed us, he now defines us. Our desires and delights and devotion all run through him. So I am a Christian, who happens to be a husband, father, pastor, friend, basketball coach, etc...
- It’s interesting that all three of these examples have something to do with money... Don’t find your identity in the empty god of money.
- This is all built on verse 8: “Bear fruits that give evidence of repentance.” Notice the order here... Fruit flows from repentance. So we could say, “Repent and Bear fruit.”
- Pic: Some of you have been Apple Picking... Here is the astounding thing about apple trees.. they produce apples!
- I have never lived in Florida or California, but I know that orange trees produce... Oranges!
- And people who have truly repented before God, produce godly fruit...
- Dunkin donuts is known for producing coffee however ironic that may be. Sam Adams is known for producing beer. The Red Sox were known this year for producing losses.. & Christians should be known for producing fruit.
- This is just what should flow out of our lives after our hearts have been captivated by the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ!
- John tells us that our lives should reflect the fruits of repentance. Now, why does Matthew 3:8 use the singular “fruit” and Luke use the plural “fruits.”? Is one of them wrong? I mean perhaps this made Sam Harris’ list of bible contradictions... All of the fruits of godliness that pour from our lives collective make up godly fruit. Pretty simple, right? This is what Paul was getting at in Gal 5:
- **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)**
- We don’t have to pick and choose. As we keep in step with the Spirit and walk in the Spirit, and live by the Spirit (all phrases in Gal 5), then we will bear love, joy, peace... and so much more! “such as these”
- So joy and peace and gratitude and humility and a thirst for God and generosity are all fruits of the Spirit that collectively make of the fruit of the Spirit.

Application: If the goal is fruit (John 15:8), then we should constantly, and ruthlessly, be evaluating our fruitfulness. We should ask one another questions: “Where do you see fruit in my life? In what areas am I lacking godly fruit?”

Application to RHC: Community Groups. The gospel levels the playing field.

Trans: So, know that a productive life begins with genuine repentance. It flows from continual repentance, and finally...

III. A productive spiritual life comes only through the baptism of Jesus (3:15-20)

- We can see that John's ministry was having quite the impact in Israel. Is he the Christ?
 - **Verse 15.** To set the record straight, John says in **verse 16.** John is not the Christ. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. This is how you will know. *He is better and his work is better.*
 - He is stronger. I am not even worthy to untie his sandals. His work is better, specifically his baptism is better.
- 1) He will baptize you with the Spirit.
- New life is the key. It's not your birth (physical sons of Abraham). It's new birth. (spiritual sons of Abraham through faith in God).
- 2) He will baptize you with fire.
- He will separate the wheat from the chaff (psalm 1) (Another picture of judgment) "Unquenchable fire" a consistent picture of hell and the second death all people face who never trust in Jesus.

So, let's talk about baptism. You have three baptisms, really four in this chapter: John's, Jesus' (Spirit and water), and the actual baptism of Jesus by John (next week). The main thing I want to do is distinguish between John's baptism, Spirit baptism and water baptism, which is a picture of Spirit baptism.

- John's baptism was *a baptism of preparation* for the Messiah. Remember that is precross. John was calling people to return to God and look for the Messiah. Christian baptism is *a baptism of proclamation*. John's baptism prepared people for what was to come in Jesus. Christian baptism proclaims to people what has been done in Jesus.
- Spirit Baptism... new life... picture of immersion... Cleansed from sin? Yes. But so much more... Drama of the gospel. Death to Life...
- Water baptism now follows Spirit baptism.
- There is nothing magical about water baptism. We do not believe that any salvific grace is conferred when a person is baptized. Baptism in no sense brings salvation. Baptism is a reflection that saving grace has already entered a person's heart through faith. Baptism is an outward reflection of an inward response that has taken place in a person's soul, namely repentance. It is a drama of the gospel!"
- So when we get together on October 28 for our baptism service and we see people say I've committed my life to follow Jesus. There's nothing to be shy about it. We are going to get jacked up and celebrate like the it's 1999 that the gospel has come with such power in these peoples' lives that they have been transformed! That's what it's going to be about... Be there.
- MEANING: Romans 6
- Explain: Believer's baptism by immersion...

Conclusion:

- **Have you been baptized with the baptism of Jesus** through repentance and faith? If so,
- **Have you displayed that through believer's baptism?**

One Final Thought: Repentance, faith, and baptism is never a dull picture in the gospels or the entire NT for that matter

- Matthew 13:44
- Zacchaeus: Today, salvation has come to this house!

Action Step: So, who is saying, "Wow, I want to follow Jesus. I need to be baptized."? CONNECTION CARD... when we pray, everyone take this card... Jesus. Baptism. Both...

- What if we step half as much time devoted to seeking spiritual productivity as we do productivity in other areas of life?