

The Coming King: Shocking Expectation (Joy)

Sermon 12-16-18

Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Luke 3:1-18

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” ⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” ¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Message:

(Play video at <http://www1.cbn.com/trading-toxic-ego-true-satisfaction>)

Chuck had everything that he thought he needed. He had respect. People feared him. He was making a good living. He didn't care if he hurt people. It didn't matter. Life was all about getting his and what he thought he needed. But what he didn't realize for a while was that what he thought he needed wasn't what he needed at all. It wasn't until he was exhausted, empty and hurting that he realized that he needed something more. Something beyond himself. God has this way of preparing the most egotistical and prideful bunch among us for Jesus. And God does His best work among us when we are broken like Chuck.

John the Baptists words are a bit jarring in our passage, but I think they're meant to be so because of what God is doing among the Israelite people, among the Jews. If you recall, John's birth was miraculous in and of itself. Zechariah and Elizabeth were having difficulty conceiving a child. The priest, Zechariah, was visited by the angel Gabriel in the temple telling Zechariah, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And, of course, Zechariah was in disbelief and the angel muted him until John was born. This foretelling of John by the angel echoes the story of Samson that we studied just a few months ago in Judges. Samson was to be a Nazirite, a holy person of God. They don't drink wine or strong drink to maintain their holiness. Not only that, but John the Baptist is the only one that I know of in the Bible that before his birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Like Samson and Jesus, the expectations are enormous for the birth and life of John. What was his role though? What is his mandate given by the angel Gabriel in the prophecy? "¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." A few key words there: Turn, Spirit, Prepare. He is going to turn people toward God by the spirit and power of Elijah. "...he will go before them." He will "...make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

While this passage we're studying today is not a typical advent passage, it speaks to making preparations for the Lord. In our case, making preparations for

the coming King, Jesus. How did John do this with the Jewish people? In our passage, in verse 3, “³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...” John prepares the hearts of the people as the angel Gabriel had foretold by calling the people to repentance. Now, think about this for just a minute. These people John is talking to are not gentiles or people unfamiliar with the faith. John is talking to the so-called “faithful” of Israel. Why baptism? Interestingly, there is no mention of baptism in the Old Testament. We only see baptism in the New Testament. It is believed to be a practice that developed likely out of the age of exile and likely by the Israelite group called the Essenes, who secluded themselves. Since they didn’t have the temple in exile to perform sacrifices for the cleansing of sins, this became an alternative practice for cleansing. Back to John, Luke evokes Isaiah here, “...⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”” John’s purpose is to prepare these people for Jesus.

This is why his next words are so shocking and jarring. “⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’” If we’re honest with ourselves, sometimes a gentle touch or a soft confrontation just doesn’t do the trick. It doesn’t jolt the soul into awakening or conviction. Sometimes we need stark, bold and damning confrontation to wake us up. Again, John isn’t talking to gentiles. John isn’t necessarily talking to the prostitutes, the drug dealers or the swindlers. John is talking to people like you and me. “Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’” These people were insiders to the faith. WE are insiders to the faith. As many of you shared in your testimonies this past year, many of us have not had a dramatic conversion experience. Many of us were raised in the church and in the faith. There is nothing wrong with that. But sometimes that leads us to believe that we are exempt from repentance and confession. That we have it all together. John’s words are bold. Even though we have strong roots in the faith, “...the ax is lying

at the root of the trees...” If we do not bear good fruit, we will be “...cut down and thrown into the fire.” Ouch!

Now, John is not calling us to a works-righteousness mentality. What is John calling us to? The crowds asked the same question. “¹⁰And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ ¹¹In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’ ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ ¹³He said to them, ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’ ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.’” Yes, John is talking about behaviors here. It might lead us to believe that if we just do these right behaviors we will be ready for Jesus. If you buy into just behavior modification here, you fall into the same trap as the people of Israel, the people John is talking to. What does John say earlier in our passage? “⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance.” So that would mean that we must repent first. This is why John uses this tree analogy. You can have all the right behaviors and follow all the laws to a “T”, you can have this ancestry in the faith, but you don’t know God. The biggest danger for people like us, people who have been faithful to God and to the Church for many years, even generations, is that we lose the repentant heart. We come into this false belief that we have nothing to confess. That we have no more sin. In order for God to do something, anything, in us we have to have broken hearts.

Some of you may know the Drexel Hill Church of the Brethren. There was great inner conflict to the point where they didn’t know what to do. They were at a loss for words. They were ready to close the doors. One of their leaders reached out to Tim Doering a few years back for help. At the same time D. Jay Martin was sensing a call towards pastoral ministry. Through the assistance and help of Cornerstone Fellowship in Lebanon, another Church of the Brethren church, they sent D. Jay to pastor and support Drexel Hill through prayer and guidance. The first thing they did, was they shut all church activities down for two months. They told the current membership to take that time to discern if they still wanted to be part of this church. They told the people to only come back after the two-month hiatus if they were sensing a call to be part of the new thing God is going to do at Drexel Hill. Drexel Hill became a re-planted church. Initially they didn’t have any formal Sunday worship. They met weekly for Bible Study discerning the heart of God for their church. D. Jay will even tell you that from a performance standpoint, when they first started worshipping on Sunday mornings after that two-month hiatus, the worship was ugly. But from a heart-standpoint their worship was true and genuine. It’s been a gradual process, but over the years Drexel Hill has gradually been redeemed and has gradually grown. It is now under the leadership

of Brandon Hanks. D. Jay is serving at Parkerford now. If you ever get a chance to talk to D. Jay, I see him regularly at Netzer gatherings, he'll say that the biggest reason that Drexel Hill was able to make the turnaround as a church was because they hit the point of brokenness. They were repentant. They were prayerful. It wasn't because of anything programmatic. It wasn't because they had incredible talent. It wasn't because of the age of the people. It was only when they became broken, repentant and started crying out to the Lord, that the Lord could do something in them. When we think we have it all together, there is nothing for God to redeem. There is nothing for God to work with.

John tells the crowds to share a coat because it is a fruit of their repentance. In ancient Israel when one was repentant they would wear sackcloth to represent their repentance. If you remember in the book of Jonah, the king of Nineveh does just this. “⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.” The king says to the people of Nineveh, “⁸Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.” They cry mightily to God to be saved from destruction. And what happens? God withholds His destruction. “Coats” in our passage is representative of sackcloth of repentance. So if an individual has the financial means to own more than one sackcloth for repentance, they should give another that sackcloth for repentance. Fruits of repentance lead others to repentance. Fruits of repentance share the means and actions of repentance. For repentant tax collectors, a fruit of their repentance is to not make tax collection a money-making scheme. If you remember, tax collectors pay taxes to Rome for the people of a particular region. And then, they collect the taxes for reimbursement from the people. OR they charge more than the tax to pocket the profit. So let's say the Roman Empire charges \$1 for every person. There are 500 people in a particular region. So the tax collector pays \$500 to the Roman Empire for these people. But when he goes to collect from the people he charges \$2 per person. So he makes a profit of \$500 on the tax collection for himself. So if tax collectors are truly repentant, they stop charging more than the proper amount for personal gain. This is fruit of their repentance. The Soldiers John speaks of are not Roman Soldiers. These are believed to be Jewish soldiers, Jewish mercenaries or soldiers of King Herod. Likely, they are present protecting the tax collectors from harm. If THEY are truly repentant, the fruit will be discontinuing extorting people and threatening people for money. Its to not be greedy and be satisfied in their wages. If these are truly repentant, these will be the fruits of their repentance.

Because these people repented and were forgiven, what happened? “¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah...” The people were filled with

expectation. The preparation for the coming King, the preparation for Jesus, is repentance. It's confession. In the waiting, we can prepare. And because we cleanse our hearts, because we confess before the Lord, we will be filled with expectation. In our video earlier, in Chuck's testimony, what was so moving is the change you see in him as he expresses the moment he accepted Jesus into his heart. He says, "...I radically changed, in an instant, both my presence, both the way I speak, act, hunger for the Word." His, later to be, wife said, "I was with him when he was saved, and he literally had a physical feeling of the Holy Spirit coming into him, which is awesome!" Expectation is defined as: a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future. Now, you can look at "Expectation" in a positive or negative light. But I think what happens in the case of repentance and forgiveness with the people with John the Baptist is they are filled with hopeful and joyous expectation. They get excited and passionate for what God is doing. There is a new vibe that is alive, real and life-giving. You sense this relief, cleansing and new sense of joy even in Chuck in the earlier video.

These people with John the Baptist get so excited after this repentance and forgiveness that they mistake John for the Messiah. With all that he's doing, you may be able to understand why. He has the characteristics of a Nazirite. He has the Holy Spirit as he preaches. Shouldn't he be the Messiah? "¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'" John understands his role and place. He understands that as much as God has blessed him and given him these gifts, there is one who is greater than he. There is one that we can all joyously expect to come. The waiting we're all experiencing isn't for nothing. It is worth the wait. But John doesn't sway from bold words, "¹⁷His [the Messiah's] winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." In other words, John is telling us that Jesus will gather up those who are truly repentant and use them for the Kingdom. Jesus isn't interested in fakers. Jesus isn't interested in those who simply follow the rules, but can't repent. Jesus is looking for a repentant sinner's heart who is willing to be shaped and molded into His disciple.

Lately, I've been binge watching a show that came out a few years ago, called, "A.D. Kingdom and Empire" that aired on NBC. It takes place at the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the beginnings of the early church. There are many things that are in the show that aren't Biblical. You can tell that the producers were trying to fill-in the narrative gaps. So there is a little bit of artistic license. The story that they develop that isn't part of the Bible is Cornelius' backstory. The Roman soldier that Peter eventually converts. They depict Cornelius as a faithful Roman soldier. In the show's version of the story,

Cornelius is the right-hand of Pontius Pilate. Cornelius is the one that puts a spear into Jesus' side to ensure that he is dead. Cornelius is the one who does Pilate's dirty work. Including, killing those Pilate deems worthy of death. Over time, in the show, you see how the weight of Cornelius' role weighs on him. What finally breaks him is when Pilate orders Cornelius to strangle a Christian woman. After this final action of his, he receives a vision from the Lord to seek out Peter, as in Acts 10. What moves me about the show's depiction of Cornelius' journey is how, he was a hardened Roman Centurion, he was faithful to the Empire, he did what he was told, but through each dreadful command and action, God softens his heart. And finally at the strangling of this Christian woman, Cornelius' heart finally breaks and his spirit is opened to Jesus. Peter, also, had to be broken. He didn't believe gentiles were to be baptized and receive the Spirit, but God, too, showed him a vision to open his heart to the gentiles, such as Cornelius. So by the time Peter reaches Cornelius, both are at a place of brokenness and the Spirit moves. Peter leads Cornelius to Jesus and many other gentiles. The Spirit moves with power among them and they all speak in tongues. The Spirit moves among the broken.

But waiting in this season isn't just about sitting back in your chair and watching the show. Waiting for the coming King is an active act of preparation and expectation. In our passage, John moves with bold action with the anointing of the Holy Spirit saying, "You brood of vipers!" John shocks the spirits of the people. He wakes them up out of apathy. He warns the long-time faithful that if they don't repent, God will take an ax to the roots and throw them in the fire. John even later uses this fire imagery as actions of the coming Messiah. John's words here are a call for us to WAKE UP!! This isn't the time for coasting in our faith. This isn't the time just to go through the motions. This is the time to examine your heart. If you're sitting here today thinking that you have no sins to confess, no need to repent, then you are far from prepared. You are far from being ready for the movement of God that is about to come. You are far from the Spirit of God. In Revelations 3:15 we hear these words sent to the church at Laodicea, "¹⁵I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. ²⁰Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. ²¹To the

one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” Again, if you don’t have a repentant, a broken heart, God can’t do anything with you. God can’t teach you. God can’t mold you into his disciple. You won’t be ready for the coming King.

Providence Church, I am calling you, God is calling you, to a place of brokenness. To confess your sins to the Lord. Not only are we on the cusp of welcoming our King, but I also believe we, as Providence Church, are on the cusp of experiencing something incredibly powerful here. When I talk with some of you, when I talk with some people from Abundant Life, we sense that God is doing something powerful and great here. We don’t know what it is. But God is on the verge of an incredible breakthrough. A movement of the Spirit. The power of God moving in our midst. It’s not something we can control, but it’s something that will give us great hope and great joy. I invite you into a spirit of brokenness and confession before the Lord so that your hearts will be prepared and you will experience the expectant joy of waiting for our savior. That you would be filled with wondrous expectation of the things God is going to do. Wondrous expectation, shocking expectation of the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit among us. Holy Spirit, I invite you to break us down, to break our hearts, to break our pride, to break our egos, so that we may be prepared for the coming King. That we may bear fruits worthy of repentance. Amen.