

Luke Chapter 3 v 15 - 20

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. who has poured out into our lives immeasurable love, love like no other, love like nothing we've ever experienced, nothing that we've ever known. We thank you again that as we come this morning, we come to you. We come to the one who has made a difference in our lives. We come to you as the one who has changed us, the one who has transformed us, the one who has, as it were, pulled back the curtains in our minds and hearts to let in the light of your truth, the light of Jesus your Son, the light, Lord, which, yes, shows up the dusty areas, the cobwebs, it shows up the sins, the failings and the faults which we've tried to hide for so long. But we thank you that, Lord, in shining that light into our hearts, so you have brought that cleansing to our hearts as well, that washing away of our sin, that forgiveness, that pardon, that assurance, that whatever our past, whatever our burdens, whatever our skeletons in the cupboard, oh, Lord, you have forgiven us, pardoned us, and accepted us, and received us, and more than that, brought us into the embrace of your love, brought us into the experience of your grace, that undeserved favor, that unmerited loving kindness, with which, Lord, you work in our lives for our good. You work in our lives for our blessing. You work all things, Lord, yes, all things, because you have a purpose and a plan for us, which we cannot see or understand, and at times, it doesn't seem to be working as we think it should, or even we would say we don't seem to be thinking that you're working as you should, but, Lord, that's because we do not see completely and clearly, because there's still a lot of, as it were, mist in the way, a lot of our own foolishness, a lot of our own pride, a lot of our own arrogance, that keeps us from seeing and trusting and relying upon you wholly and completely.

[5 : 13] O Lord, give us that faith this morning, that whatever is heavy upon our hearts, that whatever is concerning us, that, Lord, again, we may rest it all in your hands, we may trust you to bring about in our lives what is good and pleasing to you, and we pray again, O Lord, that as we come, that, Lord, whether our hearts feel like praising you or our souls want to praise you, Lord, we ask that you would give to us that great desire, that great overwhelming sense that we cannot help but worship and praise you and rejoice in you. Oh, open our eyes to see more of your glory, your beauty, your majesty, your loving kindness, more of who you are, that we may be enraptured with you, and that, Lord, as we come to your word, we may be so ready to receive and hear what you have to say to us. O Lord, you are the life-changing God, continue to transform and change us a little bit more today into the likeness of your perfect Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we ask these things now. Amen.

Amen. In our Bibles to Luke and chapter 3. Luke and chapter 3. And we looked at the first 14 verses last week, but we're going to read them again. We're going to read from verse 1 through to verse 22, and then particularly concentrate upon the words of John in verse 16 and 17 later on.

So Luke chapter 3, that's page 1029, page 1029 if you've got one of the church Bibles. In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip, tetrarch of Aeturia and Trachonitis, and Licinius tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill be made low. The crooked roads shall become straight and rough ways smooth, and all people will see

God's salvation. 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? 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. The axe has already been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. What should we do then? The crowd asked.

John answered, anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none. Anyone who has food should do the same. Even tax collectors came to be baptized. Teacher, they asked, what should we do?

[8 : 50] Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, and what should we do? He replied, don't extort money, and don't falsely accuse people. Be content with your pay. The people were waiting expectantly, and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I will come. The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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. With many other words, John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. But when John rebuked Herod the Tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done,

Herod added this to them all. He locked John up in prison. When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened. 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. So we're back in Luke in chapter 3, and if you have a Bible to hand, and I hope you have, if not there's some at the back there, Luke 3, page 1029.

And we were thinking particularly last week about the ministry of John and how in one sense his ministry was half a ministry in the sense of salvation. He was preparing the ground, preparing the way for the coming of Jesus. Now I'm sure you've all come across the phrase, the real McCoy.

Its origin is somewhat under debate. If you sort of Google it and look, there's all sorts of different people saying, oh the origin of the real McCoy is this, Scotch whiskey, the real McCay, which was slightly changed to the real McCoy. Or an inventor in the Victorian period by the name of Elijah McCoy, and his inventions were copied and faked and so on. And still others, there was a family called the McCoys in Virginia, a feuding, warring family who were very notorious. Anyway, whatever the origin of the phrase doesn't really matter. We know what it means, the real McCoy. When somebody says this is the real McCoy, we know it's genuine, the genuine article. It's not a knock-off or a copy or a fake. It's the original. It's the unique. It's the true thing. Now, when we got near the end of chapter 3, verse 15 particularly, and the people were thinking and asking themselves, this John the

Baptist, he's baptizing people, he's preaching. Is he the Messiah? Is he the real McCoy? Is he the one that we're expecting? Is he the one that's to come to be God's anointed king and saviour of his people?

[12 : 09] The Messiah is the final, the greatest of God's prophets, the last word from God in one sense. The one who would bring about, by his life and by his incredible ministry and work, all the blessings, all the promises of God that he'd given throughout the history of Israel up to that point. Is John the one? Because there's a sense of expectation. Is he really the true Messiah? And John was aware, we're told there, we're told there, in verse 16, of what they were thinking and of the questions they're asking. And so he makes it very plain. He makes it plain in other parts of the gospel as well. But here, that he's not the Messiah. He's not the final word. He's not the real McCoy. There's somebody to come, verse 16, another one. The one to come is more powerful than I. Now, we know who that is. The true Messiah is none other than Jesus Christ. The son of Mary, we've read about. The adopted son of Joseph, that we learn about a bit later. But supremely, the son of God. As we have there in verse 22, a voice came from heaven speaking, you are my son, the very voice of God.

God. But again, in one sense, as there have been all sorts of differing debates about the origin of the real McCoy, so it is in our day that people debate, is Jesus really the son of God? Is Jesus really the Messiah? Is he the genuine article? Is he the one and only? And if he is, how can we be sure?

How can we know that this Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the one who we must put our faith and trust in? After all, it's a very, very vital question. It's not just a matter of life and death, whether Jesus is the Messiah, God's appointed King and Savior. It's a matter of heaven and hell.

Not just affecting our lives in this world, but affecting our lives in eternity. Is Jesus really the Messiah? Is he really the one that God has sent to save and through whom salvation is given? Remember, even John, John the Baptist, later on, we're told here, he got arrested and locked in prison. There in the prison cell, he begins to get concerned and doubts. Later on, in chapter 7 of Luke, he sends some of his disciples to Jesus and asks the question, are you the one who is to come? Or should we expect someone else? Perhaps in that cell, but things against him. His own faith is struggling and wrestling. Now, if Jesus isn't the true Messiah, if he isn't the one who God has sent, then actually we should look more seriously at the claims of others who claim to be God's prophets. We need to look at the claims of Muhammad. Muhammad claimed to be the final prophet of God, the last prophet. And even since then, we should investigate the church of the Latter-day Saints, the Mormons, as they're more commonly known. Their last prophet was Joseph Smith, who discovered, so he tells us, the Book of Mormon and has translated it. So if Jesus isn't the last, if he isn't the Messiah, he isn't the final word from God, where do we look? Where do we go? There are so many other voices claiming that position. Well, here in these verses, in the words of John the Baptist, we have the acid test, if I put it that way. Here we have the acid test as to whether Jesus is the genuine and true Messiah, the real McCoy. First of all, we have it in the description by John of the unique ministry and work of the Messiah. But he says there, verse 16, I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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. That's the acid test. Does Jesus fulfill the criteria that John lays out for the one who is to come the true Messiah? That's what we're going to look at this morning. And next week, not next week, but in a fortnight's time, God willing, we're going to look at the second piece of evidence, which is the testimony of God the Father and the God the Holy Spirit in the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus, verses 21 and 22. So John says the Messiah would be someone who is more powerful than him. And when he speaks about him being more powerful, I think there's two aspects to that, one which is very clear and one which is perhaps more subtle. More subtly, he says, the one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.

[17 : 36] Now, in John's day, of course, people had, didn't have buckles on their sandals, didn't have shoes, they had sandals which were a leather strap which tied them up around the ankle. And when somebody came to a house, somebody of importance or somebody who was the owner of the house, the master of the house, and when he came in through the door after a long day, dusty, dirty feet, it would be the meanest, the lowest servant, the lowest slave in the house would be the one who would undo his sandals and let his feet breathe, if I can put it that way. Wouldn't be the head butler, wouldn't be the, one of the important officials in the house, it would be the least slave, the least of the least at the bottom of the pile. And so in one sense, what John is saying clearly here is, this one who is coming has more power because he has authority. He has a place of importance. He is a master, if I can put it that way. He is someone who is above me and who has greater authority than I.

Well, John was a prophet of God, directly sent and spoken to by God. We read there, didn't we, at the very start in verse 2, how the word of God came to John. He was, the only person above John, the only person he was answerable to, was God himself. He didn't count Herod, the king of the land, as being somebody he had to answer to, as his master, because he spoke against him. But God alone was the one who was more important than him. So Jesus is the one that John says, I'm not worthy to bow before and to unloose his sandals. He's somebody who has power, somebody who has authority, somebody before whom people bow and acknowledge as master, somebody even that people acknowledge as greater, than themselves. Well, in Jesus' life, does that happen? Do we find people doing that? Yes, we do.

Many people bowed before Jesus during his earthly life. Many called him master. Those who came to him for healing would often fall at his feet and say, master, please heal my servant or my daughter or my son, whoever it may be. Those who wanted his instruction and his teaching, remember the rich young ruler who came and fell at his feet and said, master, teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

But there were others as well who knew him truly for who he was and acknowledged him in this way. Here's one episode in Luke chapter 8. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town.

For a long time, this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, what do you want with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

[20 : 36] So the evil spirits recognized him and fell at his feet and acknowledged him as being such. But those who knew him, those who spent time with him, his disciples, and particularly one of those disciples who doubted Jesus at one time as to whether he was fully the Messiah, ultimately came to place his complete confidence in who Jesus was. Thomas said to him, at his feet, my Lord and my God.

John chapter 20. So Jesus certainly fulfills that acid test, certainly shows himself to be one who was greater than John, one who was acknowledged as a master, one who was acknowledged even as God himself.

That's the power. But really also, more clearly, we see he talks about the power that Jesus will exercise, or the Messiah will exercise, when he says this, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. That power directly relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

I will baptize with water, says John, he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now how do these two baptisms differ? John is putting them in contrast to one another, isn't he?

Holding them up is being very different. Remember we saw and thought last week John's baptism was not the same as the baptism with water that Jesus' disciples administered later on. John's baptism still belonged to the Old Testament ceremonial washings that were given. That's why when Paul met with some disciples like Apollos, who had not been baptized except with the baptism of John, he baptized them again in the name of Jesus, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 35] So how does it differ? Well, John's baptism is external, isn't it? Obviously. It's something that just affects the outside. It's something that just is water applied to the external of a person that has no power to change somebody on the inside. When somebody is baptized, whether they're baptized as an infant, whether they're baptized as an adult, that person is not changed in any way spiritually.

There's some false teaching about that, that it is, but it's not the case. Even as Christians and evangelicals, sometimes we get ourselves a bit het up about baptism to such an extent that we start to sort of give it more credit than it's due. No, baptism is simply water on a person. It's a sign.

It's a token. It's a picture of what Christ the Messiah would do in reality. Baptism is a picture and an assurance that when we put our faith in God, we are forgiven. It does nothing to us. It's only a sign of something inward that Christ does. Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit is inward, not external.

Although the external is changed by the inward work of his Spirit. What does it mean then to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire? Well, the verb that we use, baptize or baptism or baptized, in our minds often just has one sense, one feeling, one thought. We just think of water being applied.

When we talk about baptism in general conversation, that's nearly always what we mean. It means water baptism. Be washed or immersed. It can mean that, of course, and it does mean that in many places.

[24 : 21] But it also can refer to, in the Bible, something more. To engaging in an experience of passing through a particular situation. So, for example, Jesus uses the verb baptism to talk about his sufferings and his death upon the cross.

Later on in Luke 12, verse 50, I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I'm under until it's completed. His suffering was a baptism, an experience of suffering.

He says the same thing similarly in Mark's Gospel, chapter 10. He asks James and John, Can you drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with?

Not referring in any way, is he? To that water baptism, but to the experience of suffering and dying. This passing through, in one sense, of some amazing event.

So, in relation to the Holy Spirit, then, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is that inward experience whereby God, the Holy Spirit, indwells us and makes us spiritually alive in union with Jesus Christ.

[25 : 39] That's how it's described later on in the rest of the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians, in chapter 12, Paul is writing about the work of the Spirit, and he says this, Just as a body, though one has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body. Whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

So that baptism of the Spirit is likened to drinking the Holy Spirit. It unites us to Christ. It makes us part of his body. It makes us part of his church.

And again, later on, Paul writes in Galatians 3, All of you who were baptized into Christ, not with water, but with the Spirit.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the only way anybody becomes a Christian. Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the essential work which God alone can do inwardly and makes a distinction between before and after, life and death, in Christ and out of Christ.

[27 : 03] So Paul, when John says, when he comes, he will baptize with the Holy Spirit, he's speaking about the Messiah coming to do something amazing by his life and death and resurrection.

Here's what Jesus promised himself in John chapter 6. He stood up on the last day of the great feast and he said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. So Jesus is the source of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

He declares, he claims, he says. Does he do it? It's one thing to say you could do it, one thing to promise you can do it, but does Jesus actually do it?

[28 : 07] Yes, he does. He brings the baptism of the Spirit to his disciples in John chapter 20. After his resurrection, as he meets with them in the upper room, we're told he breathed in them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.

And when Peter, on that day of Pentecost, stands to preach before the people, he declares to them that what is happening are the actions of Jesus himself.

In his sermon, he preaches like this in Acts 2. Speaking of Jesus, exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

What's happening? The people were saying. These men are drunk with wine at nine in the morning. No, says Peter, this is to fulfill prophecy of Joel, the Spirit being poured out and it's exactly what's happened.

Jesus, the Messiah, the true one, in keeping with the promises of God's Word, in keeping with the description of him by John, is the one who has received and now has poured out and baptized us with the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 24] Ah, but hold on. Didn't it say the Holy Spirit and fire? Didn't John say and fire as well? We can't miss that out, can we? Well, no. And we don't need to because on that day of Pentecost, that's what happened as well, wasn't it?

The disciples were gathered together in prayer in the upper room, waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus said, he would send him and give him. And what happens?

At the precise moment that they receive the Spirit, we're told flames, tongues of fire appeared on their heads, a symbol, as it were, a sign of the work of the Spirit in their hearts.

Here's Acts 2, verse 3. What seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Here's the acid test for you and I this morning. Have we been baptized by the Holy Spirit? Have we received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Jesus the Messiah alone can give?

[30 : 35] That alone can bring us into Christ? That alone makes us a Christian? Because this is the essential, necessary, absolutely vital thing that must occur in your life and mine.

Why? You may ask. We'll look at verse 17 in chapter 3 of Luke, John's words. The baptism of the Spirit which Jesus brings is that which divides all people as a farmer separates wheat from chaff.

He's using the illustration of his own day when the harvest was brought in or the wheat was brought in, it was brought onto the threshing floor, usually in a barn or something like that and with a wooden sort of fork it was tossed in the air as the wind or the draft blew, it blew the loose and the chaff as it were, so the outside of the wheat away and the good wheat which was heavier fell to the ground.

So at the end after a certain amount of time you had basically just good wheat there, the chaff was blown over there and was burnt up, got rid of, useless.

And so Jesus is coming and his ministry is to divide between the true and the false, the real McCoy and the copy, the knock-off and the original, the genuine and the false.

[32 : 06] And that's certainly the truth of the life of Jesus that in his life he divided a people and still today the reality is that people are divided either for or against Christ.

and the division is vitally important. It's not a matter of political bias. It's not a matter of which team you support. It's not a matter of what your particular taste or like is.

It's a matter as we said at the beginning of life and death for John declares us here he will gather the wheat into his barn. He'll bring it into safety. He will save it.

but the chaff will be burnt with unquenchable fire which as we see again and again in the scriptures is a picture of hell even there earlier in John's preaching verse 9 the axe has been laid to the root of the tree and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Amen. There's a division that takes place between those who are baptized with the spirit and those who are not between those who are the wheat and those who are the chaff and the question has to be put to you dear friends this morning are you the real McCoy?

[33 : 29] Are you a real Christian? A genuine Christian or are you just a knock off if I put it that way? Are you just a copy of a Christian outwardly? Like the people who went to John outwardly there's a sense of repentance for sin but that's as far as it goes.

It's nothing more than that. So the trouble is as we thought again last week we need to recognise again that too many people simply settle for an alternative type of Christianity.

Too many people settle probably the majority of the people in this town if we were to ask them what religion are you they would say C of E or Christian or something. The majority would and they've settled for a second rate a knock off a copy of Christianity something which is simply a sort of a little bit on the outside.

Why are you a Christian? Well I was christened as a baby and I was married in church and no doubt I'll be buried from the church as well. Or I'm English surely I'm English so I must be a Christian.

It's purely external it's meaningless. It's a watered down sort of Christianity a watered down salvation rather the one which is fiery the one which is real the one which is experimental in the sense that we experience it and feel it and know it.

[35 : 01] And the sad truth is that in our world today and possibly even in our church we have the wheat and the chaff all mixed up together all there on the floor as it were of the threshing floor down on the ground level there are those that are fake and those that are real.

Those who have been baptised by the spirit and those who have been baptised only with water only external Christianity but you see their destinations are so very different for one it is eternal life for one it is eternal suffering it's not just here that we get this truth declared the apostle Paul as he writes to Timothy warns about the days that are coming when people will have a form of godliness he says a form of godliness but denying its power outwardly they pretend that they are Christians outwardly they'll use the name of Christ outwardly they'll go to church outwardly there'll be things in their lives which seem to give some appearance but they have no power this power that John spoke of the power that Jesus brings the power of the Holy Spirit the power that transforms it's this power that we need because we cannot save ourselves we cannot make ourselves right with God we cannot forgive our own sins we cannot change yes we can make new year's resolutions and we can try to be better people and we can go to John or to somebody else and say well what should I do to make my life better and he can say well share the things that you have that's good and be generous and loving and don't deceive people and cheat and all that sort of thing and we can live wonderfully moral lives but we have no salvation we have no peace we have no forgiveness we have no hope of heaven let me urge you not to settle with a copy let me urge you not to settle with a type of

Christianity which is second rate which is false which is useless I don't know whether you've had the experience where you've been perhaps overseas and you go into the market and there's all these genuine t-shirts super dry t-shirts and another really expensive name t-shirts for 1 euro 99 and then there's these genuine Rolex watches for 25 euros and these genuine headphones and all these sort of things and maybe you're tempted and you buy one and you bring it home and you put that t-shirt in the wash and what happens it runs and all the dye covers all your other clothes or it soon begins to fall apart or that genuine Rolex watch you wind it up and it goes boing and the spring shoots out the side and dear friends too many of us are tempted with the easy Christianity the cheap Christianity which says just just clean up the outside a little bit the fire that Jesus brings to the heart with the Holy Spirit is something which is far more certain real and we've got to have it you've got to have it and I urge you to come to Christ and seek it let's pray together now it was a great cost Lord Jesus that you came into this world great cost to yourself that you came from heaven to earth that you took on our human nature and especially that you lived amongst us rejected despised mocked ultimately murdered you did all that because there was no easy way to save us there was no simple way by which we who had rebelled against

God the Father and were on trial for our lives could ever be pardoned there was no way that that pardon that forgiveness could be ours and that we could have peace with God except that you paid the price and you did it willingly and you did it gladly so how can we possibly expect that to receive of that salvation is cheap and easy and costless yes Lord it's a free gift that you give freely freely you forgive those who come but Lord to come means to acknowledge our sin to come means surrendering our will to come means making you the rightful master of our lives and that's costly because we too will be rejected we too will have to lose and lay down our lives that we might have the fullness of life you bring we ask oh Lord that you would deliver us from that type of Christianity which is a copy and a knock off and a fake which may give us for a few moments a little bit of a sense that everything is okay but can never save us can never make us right with you can never satisfy oh Lord give us those give us each a hunger and a desire and a longing for the baptism of the

Holy Spirit that he may come and indwell us and transform us and unite us to Christ and oh Lord save us may none of us settle for what is worthless and what is disastrous when you so gladly willingly offer and will give eternal life make your word effective in our lives and we pray in the days ahead for we ask it in Jesus name Amen