

Explore the Bible: January 10

Prepared • Luke 3:7-18

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Although it has been widely debunked over the years, the legend persists of the “Hurricane Party” at the Richelieu Apartments in Pass Christian the night before Hurricane Camille in 1969. Supposedly, residents of the luxury apartment complex ignored dire warnings of the expected devastation and gathered on the third floor to party the night away.

The next morning (and this part is documented truth), all that was left of the massive structure was a “debris-littered concrete slab,” with 23 residents dead, according to a report by the Daily Herald newspaper in Gulfport. A survivor said the “Richelieu manager had assured residents the building was safe and designated a Civil Defense shelter,” the paper adds. However, nobody could have fully imagined the power of Camille’s catastrophic winds and water that demolished the Gulf Coast.

Hurricane warnings allow residents to make preparations to safeguard life and property. The wise heed the admonition; others do not. Sadly, many have paid for such negligence with their lives.

As we begin Luke chapter three, we see a change of focus from recent studies. John the Baptist arrives on the scene with a

stern message for those who came out to the wilderness to hear him. In Luke 3:4-6, we learn this fiery preacher's ministry was foretold in Isaiah 4:3-5. He was to be one to "prepare the way for the Lord" (NIV). Luke 3:3 tells us John came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (This preliminary step would be culminated later with the full Gospel message; see Acts 18:24-26.)

We often think of baptism as a Christian ordinance, and that it is, but a similar rite was practiced when a Gentile wished to convert to Judaism. According to an article found at sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/37029-jewish-proselyte-baptism, "There was process through which a non-Jew could become a Jewish proselyte, and that process involved three things. A sacrifice, circumcision, and baptism." Thus, this principle was one familiar to those who were coming to John.

Luke 3:7 uses the word, "crowds," to describe the multitudes coming to be baptized. Note how John addressed some who came. He called them a "brood of vipers." Many obviously presented themselves with impure motives, which John spiritually discerned. He demanded that they "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (v. 8).

Perhaps many wanted baptism just for show, thinking since they were descendants of Abraham they were already among the spiritually elite. The time of judgement was at hand, John declared, and "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (v. 9).

Many people, being convicted in their hearts, sincerely asked what was required of them. Three groups of people offered this searching question. John addressed each based on things that might stand between them and God.

To the first, he told them to share food and clothing with those in need (v. 11). Many Old Testament Scriptures show that caring for the less fortunate was an indisputable standard for

faithful Jews to follow. The next group to which John responded was tax collectors. John commanded them to not collect more than what the Roman government required (v. 13), for which they were notoriously guilty. The next group was soldiers, who were admonished not to use their power to take unfair advantage of others and to be satisfied with their wages (v. 14). Although each group had specific things John addressed, they all could dovetail back to Jesus' response to a lawyer's question: "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" (Matt. 22:36 NKJV). We are to love the Lord with our total being, and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (vv. 37-39). These kinds of actions demonstrate true repentance. (The word, "repent," actually means to change one's mind, which results in a changed way of living.)

The Jews had long awaited the oft-propheesied Messiah and in the last three verses of our focal passage, we see that some people wondered if John was that Messiah. John immediately refuted this supposition (v. 16). His was only water baptism, he said, pointing out the One to come would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Those who repented and accepted Messiah Jesus' message would receive the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Those who rejected it would face a fiery judgement (Luke 3:17).

Verse 18 concludes by saying John shared "other exhortations" and "good news." We see this same combination of warning and blessing in Romans 6:23 (NKJV): "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Now, that's definitely a message worth sharing!

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