



LOCKINGCASTLECHURCH

Life Group Notes – 6th December 2021

Ready for the Holy Spirit. Luke 3:1-16

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Luke 3: John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene –² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁴ 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.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.”’

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’⁸ 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.⁹ The axe has 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.’¹⁰ ‘What should we do then?’ the crowd asked.¹¹ John answered, ‘Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.’¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptised. ‘Teacher,’ they asked, ‘what should we do?’¹³ ‘Don’t collect any more than you are required to,’ he told them.¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we do?’ He replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.’

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.¹⁶ John answered them all, ‘I baptise 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 baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Comment

In ancient times, when a King had chosen to visit a town, a herald was dispatched several months beforehand to announce the news and tell the people to get things ready. They would want to tidy up the rubbish, get their houses and hospitality in order and make sure the local roads were good. Imagine the embarrassment if the King couldn’t actually reach the town or his entourage got stuck in the mud. So, it was a kindness that a herald came in advance to give them time to sort things out. John the Baptist was the herald for the coming of Jesus and he warned people to get their hearts in order. Luke points out that God’s salvation would be for all people, and even tax collectors and soldiers were given the opportunity to repent and live spiritually fruitful lives. John called the pharisees and sadducees ‘vipers’ because their loveless form of religion was actually poisonous. Religious piety or position is no guarantee of a heart prepared for the Holy Spirit. Instead we need to examine ourselves to see if we too are guilty of endorsing inequality, corruption or extortion and repent in readiness for the Lord to use us. Jesus came to bring not only the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Grace and empowerment) but also a baptism of fire (Holiness and refining). It is this combination of comfort and challenge that enables us to live effective Christian lives.

Questions

- 1) ‘The Word of the Lord came to John the Baptist in the wilderness.’ Why do you think so many Biblical characters encountered God in the wilderness and what can we learn from their example?
- 2) Why do you think people came to John despite his ‘challenging’ style of preaching?
- 3) What are some ways we can challenge inequality, corruption and extortion in our day?
- 4) What does the phrase ‘He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ mean to you?
- 5) What is the difference between John’s baptism and Christian Baptism?