



## **Luke 3:10–14**

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 ex-

tort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.'

## **Reflection**

John the Baptist is quite the case study as a preacher and as a person. Think about his heritage as set out for us in Luke's Gospel so far. He's been given equal air time to Jesus. Luke didn't start with Joseph and Mary, instead he started with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Jesus' birth was announced in the middle of nowhere, but John's was announced in the holiest place on earth. Gabriel first visited John's parents before moving on to Mary and Joseph. Soon we'll see the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove, but we've already read that Holy Spirit filled John, even from his mother's womb. And right now, in Luke chapter 3

Jesus is a nobody, just a carpenter cousin of John, a good young man, enjoying the favour of God and his neighbours but certainly at this point in time no-one particularly special indeed.

But John is fast becoming the greatest prophet since Elijah. In fact he looks a great deal like Elijah, wearing the same clothes and preaching with the same fire in the same region just as was foretold by the angel Gabriel now thirty years ago. And perhaps 'fire' is an understatement, although the word certainly features heavily in John's preaching. Yesterday Luke outlined John's preaching for us in these words,

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.’

John preached hellfire and brimstone. The kingdom of God is near. Repent. Prepare the way in your lives for the Messiah before it is too late. And they came out to him in their thousands, people from all walks of life. Not just Jews, but Roman soldiers, not just Pharisees and Teachers of the law but tax collectors and sinners too. John

preached urgent repentance for the forgiveness of sins and baptised people as an outward sign of the cleansing of hearts that repentance and returning to God in faith brings. And John brought revival. He levelled mountains and filled valleys and straightened crooked lives, he built a great highway of repentance, preparing Jew and Gentile alike for the coming of Jesus into their lives. Just listen in today's passage how his words cut people to the heart from all walks of life, reading from Luke 3:10–14,

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tors 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.’

With one voice the crowd responds not with anger and offense but with contrition,

‘What should we do then?’

And John’s answer is surprising. Kent Hughes speaks well when he says that we might have expected that John would ask them to do something penitential (‘Go and give money to the orphans in town’) or ecclesiastical (‘Commit yourself to your

local synagogue’) but significantly, John’s advice is ethical. He asks them to change the way they treat their fellow human beings.<sup>1</sup>

‘Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.’

And the same goes for tax collectors and even Roman soldiers. To the tax collectors John says,

‘Don’t collect any more than you are required to,’

And he has a similar message for the Roman soldiers,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 115.

‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.’

One of the firstfruits of repentance according to John is not doing penance or doubling-down at church but is in fact changing the way we treat our fellow human beings. And this is perfectly consistent with what the Bible teaches of the Holy Spirit who is at work in repentant hearts. His fruit becomes increasingly evident in the lives of Christians and has everything to do with the way we treat others. Just have a listen to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5,

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.



So many of these fruits of the Spirit bubble over into the lives of others. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control all flow out of a repentant heart that has made way for the Holy Spirit; and the first test of genuine repentance and faith according to John is a change in the way we treat others – just as Jesus said in John 13:35,

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

## **Think**

But to ponder this morning I'd like you to notice that the three examples that John gives us all have to do with money and

material possessions. The crowds are to share with those in need, tax collectors to only collect the prescribed amounts and soldiers are not to extort money. The Holy Spirit through John's message is telling us that the way we hold on to money and material things in relationship to others is a good indicator of the authenticity and health of our spiritual lives.

But please don't get me (or this text) wrong. Generosity is not the means of redemption; but it is an evidence of redemption, a natural outworking of the transformation that has begun in our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit in our repentance and faith. In fact, we can go as far as to say that generosity and giving are pillars of Christian discipleship. No-one truly follows Jesus who hasn't learned to give. You

might have reached a sticking point in your spiritual development, and you wonder why. You read your Bible, your language has changed, you are honest. But regular, generous giving? Well, you are not quite ready for that. Therefore, you do not keep growing in your soul.<sup>2</sup>

One of the firstfruits of genuine saving faith is a change in the way we treat others and so often this change is infused with generosity. Is this true in your experience? Have you found yourself becoming increasingly generous with your time, your talents and your treasure as you grow in relationship with our Lord? Have you found yourself less caught up in your possessions, and thinking less about your next bonus or the suburb that you'd like to live in one day?

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<sup>2</sup> Hughes, Luke, 660.

The wealth that many of us in Australia enjoy is a gift and blessing of God but the trajectory of the Christian faith is one of living ever more loosely towards our money. In our culture people have a lot of money but what most people don't realise is that money also has a lot of them. We are not our own, we were bought at a price which means we cannot serve two masters; we simply cannot serve both God and money and enjoy much more than the frustrated infancy of the Christian faith.

## **Pray**

Pray today for increasing change in the way you treat others. And pray that the change might be noticed and appreciated by those God has placed in your life. Pray that they might be so blessed by

your good deeds and generosity, that they would recognise the hand of God in them, repent of their sins, turn and follow him.