



The Harsh But Good News-Part 1

Why “As You Are” Can’t Stay that Way

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, imagine being loved by Billy Joel. Because if you were, you’d be loved “just the way you are.” And what he means by that is: don’t go changing to try and please him. You’ve never let him down before. Don’t—don’t try some new fashion. Don’t—don’t change the color of your hair. When you want to work that hard, change is tough. And as he says—right—he promised that he loved you and that’s forever. It’s a promise from the heart. He couldn’t love you any better. He loves you just the way you are.

So sweet, isn’t it? I mean, any better than that? Not sure his three ex-wives believe it, but it makes for a great sentimental, sappy, mawkish, schmaltzy romantic love song of the 1970s, right? I mean, fits great.

Well, newsflash. As much as that may sound like a modern worship song, Billy Joel is not God. And God—thankfully—is not Billy Joel. Two different realities there. And God—just to carry this on into absurdity—certainly doesn’t want his preachers to be Top 40 disc jockeys, if you know what I mean. When it comes to what God thinks and how he wants his preachers to relay his information, he made that very clear. Jesus did—the incarnate God.

He said in Luke 7, look at John the Baptist. Now, people looked at John the Baptist and heard what he said and they got offended—really offended. And Jesus asked this rhetorical question: What did you go out into the desert to see? Did you want to see a reed that was shaken by the wind? Now think of that metaphor. Did you want somebody just, you know, moving this way, and then—no, you don’t like that?—let’s go move that way. We’ll take a poll and find out what you want us to say. I mean, is that what you went out to see? You’re offended by him? I don’t understand.

What did you go out into the desert to see? Did you go out to see—now here’s an interesting Greek word here in this phrase—he said, did you go out to see someone dressed in *malakos* clothing? *Malakos*—that’s the word that’s translated in the ESV “soft clothing.” That’s the word used in 1 Corinthians for the feminine—right? The men that act very feminine and dress like women. Did you go out to see some sweet pastor guy giving you some sweet little message? Is that what you wanted? What, you want some feminine preacher? Did you have to go to the prince’s palace for that?

He said, what did you go out into the desert to see? You were offended by him, but you wanted to see the prophet. That’s what you told your friends—“Let’s go hear the prophet, hear what he has to



say.” He said, yes, and you did see a prophet—and more than a prophet. He said, when you went out there to see that prophet, you saw the one of whom it is written—right, quoting now Malachi 3—the messenger that would be sent before your face, Jesus says, to prepare the way before you. The Lord is going to come, and he’s sending his messenger before the coming of the Lord to prepare. And that’s a key word that’s used throughout the descriptions in the New Testament of John the Baptist.

Now, they didn’t like what he said. It was—as our series title depicts here—a harsh message in the ears of people. They thought it was offensive and unnecessarily rude, and they didn’t like it. It didn’t sound as sweet as people want their sermons to be. And yet Jesus said, as he finishes that discussion in Luke 7, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.” He’s the one. If you want a paradigm, a template of preaching that is lauded by heaven, you should look at John the Baptist.

And we have the privilege for the next four sessions in our time together in our study of Luke to analyze and study the life and ministry of John the Baptist as we reach the third chapter of our verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of Luke. And it’s a privilege, but as I’ve warned you here in the title of our series, it’s a bit—it’s a bit, you know, I don’t know—it’s jarring for us in our day. And as I’ve said before, you know, if this were the kind of preaching that someone brought to some candidate situation in a church, they’d never get the job, right? This is really forthright, direct, in your face, and not really concerned about, you know, being politically correct, ecclesiastically correct—being someone that says what people want to hear.

Well, as we study this text—and we’ll look at the political setting here in just a second as we read verse 1—but can we go back even before we get to chapter 3, just to read the summary real quick of what the angel said to Zechariah? Remember, he’s the Judean hill-country priest who had his opportunity once in a lifetime to burn the incense in the holy place of the temple. Gabriel shows up, says, “You’re going to have a son. You and your wife are old, I get that; you’ve given up on having kids; you’re going to have a child in your old age.” And that’ll be a great thing—everyone will rejoice in that. But I’ve got to tell you about this child you’re going to have.

Here’s what he says: Luke chapter 1—drop down, if you would, to verse 15—Luke 1:15. He says, “He will be great before the Lord.” You’re going to have a kid who’s going to grow up and do something, and it’s going to be great. God is going to see him as a great man, a great preacher. “He must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled—amazingly enough—with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” That’s unique.

Verse 16, and now he starts—these are themes, we’ll look at these today—but themes from Malachi, the end of the Old Testament: “He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their

God, and he will go before him.” Now those are pronouns you’ve got to catch: “He will go before him.” Both those pronouns, we need to find the antecedent for. He—who’s he? John—will go before him—who’s him? The Lord. The Lord is coming, which is what Malachi was all about. The Lord is coming; the day of the Lord is coming. Now the messenger is going to come before the Lord shows up, “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” which is exactly how Malachi 4 said it would happen, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous,” or “the wisdom of the just,” as it’s translated here.

Now, this is the phrase you need to underline and you need to highlight. It helps us understand some of the poetic references to Isaiah 40 that all four Gospel writers give us about “the voice of one calling in the wilderness.” Here’s what he says: “to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” A lot of talk in all of the Gospel writers’ discussions of John about mountains made low and valleys raised up, and you think, oh, that’s from Isaiah 40. And we get that in its historic context of the return of the Israeli exiles from Babylon, but then that’s prophetically looked ahead to something that almost seems eschatological from our perspective, and it’s going to happen at the end of time. But all the Gospel writers connect that passage to John the Baptist’s ministry—preparation. But it’s symbolic; it’s an allegory; it’s an illustration of things being turned around—crooked things straight, rough places made level. All of that, he says, is not about preparing geography. That’s all an illustration for what? Preparing people. That’s the ministry of John the Baptist. The Lord is coming. The incarnate God is going to show up. He’s going to do something very important—surprisingly, in two installments: the first coming and the second coming. But when he comes, this messenger, this child of yours, Zechariah, is going to prepare people. And people, if they respond to what he says, will be ready for the coming of the Lord.

We saw at the end of our discussion of John the Baptist that he goes out into the desert—we talked about Survivorman, right? Eight days, or whatever it is. He’s there for a couple of decades living in the desert. Now, Luke doesn’t tell us this in chapter 3, but Matthew and Mark make it clear he’s dressing funny and eating locusts, right? He’s real Survivorman living in the desert—the Judean desert. If you’ve ever been to Israel with us, we take that day when we go out into the desert to Qumran and to the Dead Sea. When you leave the mountainous region of Jerusalem—I’ll go this way for you—and go out to the desert to the Dead Sea, that arid, hot desert—just, I mean, God-forsaken land—is where he is living. Not much to live on there.

And in that context, see, God picks up the Old Testament story, if you will, after 480 years of silence. And he now gives his word to John, the son of a country priest, and brings the message that is necessary to prepare people for the reception of the Messiah.

So let’s look at our context here real quick—not too bogged down in any of the history here—but Luke gives us a lot of history in the first verse and a half. So let’s read it through and at least pick some of the names out here and tie them together to offices and at least get our bearings historically: “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate”—there’s a familiar name; this

is Luke 3:1—“being governor of Judea, and Herod”—that’s Herod Antipas, by the way; we’ll look at that—“being the tetrarch of Galilee.”

Do you know that word “tetrarch”? *Tetra* means four—tetragrammaton, right? The four consonants that make up the holy name of God. *Tetra*—four. I can’t think of another word right now; you can take one—look it up. *Archē* in Greek—the *archs* are leaders, rulers—four leaders. We had Herod the Great; his kingdom split up into four parts. Here are some of the tetrarchs: Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee—that’s Herod Antipas. They all had the name Herod. Philip, the tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene, “during the priesthood—the high priesthood—of Annas and Caiaphas.”

Just for historical purposes, let’s talk through those real quick. The first one is the Emperor of Rome—you understand that—Tiberius Caesar. Now, who was the Emperor when Jesus and John were born? Caesar Augustus. Remember, he gave the decree to do the census, and that’s what brought the family back—Joseph and Mary—to Bethlehem, and Jesus was born. Well, he’s gone; he dies in A.D. 14. I put a little box there in the corner of your worksheet on the bottom—nothing to fill in there—but just to give you a visual, at least, of the overlap of all of these rulers. The guy at the top there, Tiberius, succeeds Caesar Augustus, the great, you know, founder and Roman Emperor. And now we have Tiberius who, by the way, carries on all of Caesar Augustus’s policies with kind of a stern, rigid, you know, kind of consistency. He was actually called dour and very stern and rough and tough, but he was a seasoned politician. He basically just took what Caesar Augustus wanted to do and implemented it for many years. As you’ll see in the little box, he reigns until 37—A.D. 37.

Now the text says it’s in the fifteenth year—that’s why I put a star there with A.D. 28–29. That would be the timeframe we’re talking about if we’ve got the dates right, and I believe that we do—A.D. 14 to 28/29.

Then it talks about Pilate, and you’ll see there in the box he’s starting his governorship—being the prefect, as they called him, of Judea—taking the place of one of the tetrarchs—no time for that history. But he starts in A.D. 26 and serves for 11 years—till 36. In A.D. 36, he, by the way, was questioned by some of the old critics of the Bible as even being a real figure. In 1961, they found that inscription—there’s at least a replica of it on display there in Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean Sea—where we found an inscription with his name: “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea.” Clearly a historical figure—no doubt about it—and it’s been affirmed a million times over in our minds even as we go through and find things like that.

Herod, tetrarch—this is Antipas. He’s the son of Herod the Great, being the tetrarch of Galilee. Now, again, if Pilate’s in charge of things down south, Galilee is up north—that’s Herod Antipas.

He's the one who ends up killing John the Baptist—more on that in a couple of weeks—and he wanted to kill Christ, according to Luke 13. That's the one that, when we hear the word "Herod," as you'll see his reign from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39—he's the one whenever you see the word Herod in the Gospels or even in the book of Acts—that's who we're talking about: Herod Antipas. Actually, we'll talk about his fight against John the Baptist coming up.

Then it says Philip, the tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis—and those are debated regions, probably western Jordan, modern-day Kingdom of Jordan, and even southern Lebanon, probably. And then Lysanias—we don't know a lot about, and that's why I didn't put any dates for him there. But most people were questioning that in the day—the critics of the Bible saying, "Luke's got it all wrong, because Josephus mentions a Lysanias who died and was murdered, I think, in 35–37 B.C.," and they said, "Well, Luke doesn't have his information right." Since then, we've discovered an inscription with Lysanias's name dedicating a temple wall that dates him to this date—they put him right here, at least in the two years leading up to A.D. 28–29. Don't have firm dates on that, but hopefully more archaeology will give us more information eventually about Lysanias. And he is a tetrarch of Abilene—which is in Texas off of Interstate 20. That's disputed too—some people wonder why even put such an obscure leader in here. Some people would speculate that Luke is from Syria, and Abilene is adjacent there to southern Syria—anyway, just a lot of speculation there.

"During now the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas." Now, if you don't know anything about the Bible, you think about the high priest—figuring there should only be one—and that's true: there is only one high priest. Here he lists two. Some people criticize Luke even for that. I mean, people who want to be critics of the Bible can try to criticize every little thing. Well, here's something that has been borne out in history if you understand what was happening with the heavy hand of Rome over Israel at this time—even the high priest had to be sanctioned by Rome. Annas was sanctioned by Rome; make a long story short, he ends up offending the Roman officials and gets deposed and kicked out of office in A.D. 15. I didn't put a mark there for that, but they went without a high priest for a while until Rome sanctioned his son-in-law, Caiaphas, to become the high priest. Now if you track forward you'll see he doesn't end his high priesthood until A.D. 36, and you know that when Christ was crucified, he ends up in Caiaphas's courtyard—remember the scene where Peter's warming his hands at the fire in Caiaphas's courtyard there in southern Jerusalem. That situation that takes place is in Caiaphas's courtyard, and he's standing before the high priest Caiaphas.

What John is careful to record, though, is that before he ever goes to Caiaphas to get a ruling, he ends up at Annas's house, standing before Annas. See, what happened here is, if you were an observant Jew in the day, you understood that the Romans no longer would give sanction to Annas as the high priest, but you still gave him deference—it was almost like a co-regency of high priests. That's why Luke, knowing the history, says it was during the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. Who was the official high priest? Caiaphas was. But, you know, the son-in-law didn't do a lot without his father-in-law's approval. At least that's the picture we get in history, and especially through the references that are made by John in his Gospel. So we have kind of a, you know, messy situation there with Annas and Caiaphas.



Now, you're living in the first century; you're living under a lot of layers of authority. You've got the Emperor; you've got—if you're living in the southern part, like Zechariah and John were—if you're listening maybe to some of John's sermons—you've got Pilate. He's a very important person; you couldn't even crucify anyone—obviously, as the story goes—without him signing off on it. You've got the high priesthood, the Sanhedrin—you've got all these people. And they're all named here. I understand Luke is trying to be a good historian and give us the timeframe which, by the way, if this is A.D. 28–29, and you remember that Herod the Great dies in 4 B.C., then we've got John and Jesus being around 33 years old at this particular point. Later in this chapter, we'll see Luke says that he's "about 30," and in John 8 they said, "You're not even 50." So the pictures of his age—that's about the age that we get over the ages, and he's about 30—specifically probably 33 years old this time.

You've got a lot of voices you have to listen to; you're under a lot of layers of authority. Now, with all that said, bottom of verse 2—this is a big statement. One, unfortunately, it doesn't have the striking, you know, discordant feel to our hearts as it would if we were thinking straight about this because we're so used to hearing the words "the word of God." But after all of that description of all the authorities in your life—right? Picture the government, the governor, the mayor, the senators, the president, the Supreme Court, whatever—then it says, "The word of God came to John." The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

You want to talk about a contrasting statement here—of a word coming to John from an authority that trumps every authority on earth—here comes God's. God's got something to say to the world, and he picks John—obviously not randomly; picked him out from the beginning of time—the son of a hill-country Judean priest. And this guy's a weirdo living in the wilderness, eating locusts and wearing funny clothes. He is the one chosen by God, in his austere kind of lifestyle, to bring a message to the world.

Now, I want us to think of it this way: you've got an option in the first century, and you've got an option in the twenty-first century, to figure out whose voice you're going to listen to—what authority you're going to live under, what body of information you're going to defer to. And all of us have to make those choices. All I want us to do is to think broadly enough, with the macro view of everything, to stand back and ask ourselves the question: Are we really picking the right authority here? And do we recognize when it comes our way—ultimate authority—which comes through some pretty marginal vehicles; in this case, a guy living out in the desert in the wilderness of Judea.

I put it this way, number one in your outline, just to deal with those two first verses: we need to **recognize ultimate authority**. Recognize it when you hear it; recognize it when you read it. Because all of us are pressured all the time to conform to the authorities in the world—whether it's



our culture and you're highly democratic, whatever the polls say; whether you defer to the government; whether you think about the law of the land—"I'm under the rule of law, whatever the Supreme Court says." You've got decisions to make. Or, like most moderns, you just decide based on how you feel—intuitively, you are the ultimate authority. But when all the authorities are laid out on the table, you've got to make a choice. And all I'm saying is: if there is a God and he has spoken, you'd better recognize ultimate authority when you read it or when you hear it. You'd better know—and then you'd better make some clear choices.

Now, I wrote a little blurb—some of you have already read it if you came early, maybe, or you got it in your email box on Friday. That little blurb I wrote—I wrote in response to an article that I read about how foolish, weak Christians are to keep running to the Bible to tell people what we believe and how we're going to live and what our values should be and our morals. They say, "What a bunch of superstitious mystics to keep running back to the Bible," using words like "illogical" and "irrational." Now, you can write books on this—and guys have. I tried to write a paragraph about the fact that this is not illogical and irrational, any more than us saying, "I don't really care at the end of the day what Tiberius Caesar says, what Pontius Pilate says, what Philip or Herod or Lysanias or Annas and Caiaphas say." If God has spoken, that has to be my final authority—if, indeed, that's true. If I have reason—logical reason—to believe that God has broken into time and space and spoken his mind to us, then what I've got to say is it's not illogical or irrational at all. Nothing makes more sense to the God that I have to give an account to. If there is, in fact, a God, I'd better make sure—before I dismiss the Bible as a superstitious book—that it's not the word of God; that the prophets that record their message in the pages of the Bible aren't really messengers or spokespeople for God. Because if they are, I'm not going to get out of this with impunity; I'm going to be in big trouble. Because if God has spoken, he expects us to be listening. And that is not something God just wants us—as some religions recommend—to just feel in our gut. God wants us to have reasonable, logical reasons to go about making that decision.

Keep your finger here in Luke chapter 3 and turn with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 18. You can say, "Well, John can say he's speaking for God, and Luke can say that John spoke for God, but, man, who really knows who's speaking for God? That's why I'm just going to decide this all on my own." God knows the dilemma that we're in—anyone can say they're speaking for God. God knows that we live in a world where a lot of people say they're speaking for God. There's a lot of—as it's put in the Old Testament—false prophets. The New Testament often goes on—false teachers. Paul calls some "false apostles." They claim to have authority from heaven and speak for God, but they don't. God knew that would be a problem from the very beginning.

Deuteronomy chapter 18. Now, the context for the first five books of the Old Testament is—you remember—Moses ends up penning these (Jesus and the rest of the Bible confirms) in the wilderness when they've gotten out of Egypt. And if you've been doing our daily Bible reading—smile at me if you've been doing our daily Bible reading; if not, you can start today so you can still smile at me—we're reading through Exodus. I think this morning we read chapter 13 or 15. We've gotten out of the slavery from Egypt in chapter 12—that was the Passover—and now we're heading out into the desert; had the big scene today about the defeat of the Egyptian army. And you know



the story ahead of time, don't you? They're going to end up at the foot of Mount Horeb on the Sinai Peninsula, getting the voice of God speaking authoritatively to them.

Here's the thing: that's all kind of what we want, isn't it—to clear up the confusion? "God, just speak to me." Well, when he speaks to the people, the people go, "Stop speaking to me. We don't want to hear this. It's too dreadful. It's too frightening. It's too crazy. It's too severe. We don't want to hear it. We'd like to know what your will is; we'd like to know what you think, but this is killing us—to hear your voice from the mountain." So God says, Fine, I'll speak to you through Moses. But as he begins with Moses—all through the rest of the prophets of the Bible—he wants to make sure that not just anybody who stands up and says, "I speak for God," is believed. You shouldn't believe every voice that claims to be from God.

Okay, here's some of the instructions that come in that time period, and actually refer to that situation at Mount Horeb. Verse 15—I'm sorry, verse 15—Deuteronomy 18:15. Agree with me on this: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet"—it's a great Hebrew word; the word *navi*. It simply means a mouthpiece. "I'm going to grab like a megaphone off the shelf; it's going to be a person, and I'm going to speak through that person"—a *navi*, a prophet. "I'm going to raise up a prophet for you like me"—he's going to speak for me. And actually, he's going to reflect a lot about me, because these prophets were to be godly people, reflecting the attributes of God in many ways—characteristics and morality—"from among you, from your brothers." He's going to be one of you, though—not going to be an angel; he's going to be a person. "It is to him that you shall listen," right? Listen as though he's God, because I'm going to speak through these people; "just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'" The LORD said to me, "They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a *navi*—a prophet, a mouthpiece—like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth." That's a huge claim. Anybody can claim it—you can claim it, I can claim it, Joseph Smith—anybody can claim it. The question is, is it real? And if it is real—if John the Baptist is really getting the word of God, it's coming to him, and he's speaking—that's a huge deal. It's as though God himself were speaking from Mount Horeb. That's huge.

Middle of verse 18: "I'll put my words in his mouth; he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words"—even though they're coming through the mouth of the prophet—"that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." If you do not do what a prophet of God says, you'll be held accountable as though you directly disobeyed God. That's huge. Think that one through.

Now, if we have these prophets showing up, I want to make sure I know it's a prophet of God, and I want to have some confidence that this is really God speaking. He addresses that: "But the prophet"—verse 20—"who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak"—he's just standing up saying, "I'm speaking for God," when it really is not—"or who



speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.” And you should put the “prophet” in quotes there because he’s not a real prophet—not a prophet of God. Capital punishment. This is not a job career you want to kind of test out—“play around with that; I’ll be a prophet when I grow up.” You want to make sure, before you ever try to speak for God, that you’re speaking for God—because if you’re wrong, you die. That’s how he set it up here in the nation of Israel.

“And if you say in your heart, ‘Well, how in the world am I going to know? How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’”—how are we going to know when it’s false? Verse 22: “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. And you need not be afraid of him.” In other words, you can’t be a prophet unless there’s some objective proof that your prophecy is from God.

Two things that they did—and we see throughout the Bible. One we’re seeing unfold in the Pentateuch—in the first five books of the Bible. When Moses comes out of Egypt, part of the whole issue of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was so that God could display his power through Moses. When Moses was at the burning bush and he says, “Okay, I’m supposed to go and say, ‘God said let the people go.’ How in the world are they going to believe me?” What was God’s answer? “I’m going to endow you with the ability to break natural law—to suspend natural law. Then they’re going to look at you and go, ‘Wow, this must be God.’” And that’s what the ten plagues were all about. That picture was so that people could sit there and listen to a human being named Moses and say, “These are not the words of a man. These are the words and directives and commands of God,” because he does things that only God can do—suspend natural law.

The other way—because not all of us could be contemporaries of a prophet to know there was a prophet among us—was here, clearly inscribed: when the prophet says something, or, in our case, we read the written prophecy of a prophet, if he says things—and this will be the characteristic of prophecy—it will be punctuated by predictions. Not like Jean Dixon and not like Nostradamus. These are very clear, specific predictions, like Daniel talking about the succession of governments, and the continuing of the nations, and the next leader who would do this and decree that, and how many years this would happen—all of the specificity of biblical prophecy. If they don’t come true—not a prophet. So that would include, logically, short-term prophecies and long-term prophecies. And we see that all throughout the prophets: they make some short-term prophecies of things that would take place that you could tell within a matter of months and years, and they made long-term prophecies about things that would happen hundreds of years later—just like Malachi did about the coming of John the Baptist.

If that punctuates the writings of the prophets that claimed to be from God—speaking in the name of the God who created heaven and earth—and we have something now, even 2,000 years later, from the New Testament, we can look at and say it bears the marks of something that no one else can do but God, and that is view the future. Tiberius couldn’t predict the future; he could only



guess. Annas and Caiaphas couldn't predict the future. Neither could Lysanias, Philip, or Antipas. They couldn't tell the future—but God can. And if God speaks through a prophet and he puts those predictive things on paper and they actually come true, you'd better listen to the message that he brings you from God—then you'll know it's from God. "Don't fear him" if they don't come true. If they do come true—let's invert that command—you'd better fear him. You'd better listen to him. And if you disregard what he says, you'll be disregarding the voice of God.

Now, you can say we're a bunch of mystics running to the Bible. But the people who say that kind of thing—I wonder, have you ever really looked at the characteristic of biblical prophecy that no other religious book has? Very specific things about what's going to take place that we can now look at—as long as we can establish these things were written before those things happened, and we can. I mean, think about the pause between the Old Testament and the New Testament—over 400 years. God puts a pause on it all so we understand—at least when it comes to all the prophecies about the coming of Messiah—they all happen before Christ came. If we're holding a book in our hands this morning at church that contains those kinds of specific prophecies, then what those prophets have said about how to live, about the priorities of our lives, about the agenda that we should have—about how we ought to treat our wives, how we ought to raise our kids—you'd better do them. Because—as this text says—if you don't do them, "I will require it of you." I will hold you accountable for it.

The claim after 400-plus years of silence is that the word of God comes to John. Now here's something you should note, if you're taking notes on this: John 10, verse 41, says John never did a miracle. He never did a sign. He never performed a miracle. But he made several short-term prophecies about the coming of Christ that took place where people could see it. Not only that, the one who did a lot of miraculous signs said he was a prophet, and he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding a messenger. And when the one who dies and rises again and does miracles—and raised the dead and the blind start seeing—if he says, "That guy's a prophet," I'd better believe John the Baptist is a prophet. Therefore, whatever he says—if you don't do what he says—it'll be required of you.

I mean, just to make a real quick—quick, quick—pastoral point. And let me make it from the words of Hebrews chapter 3, if you'd turn there real quickly before we get back to Luke 3. If what you're holding—and you may be a hyper-skeptic, fine; do your homework—if it's not the word of God, let's all go and have brunch every Sunday morning, and play golf, or do something else. If it is the word of God, we'd better study it, we'd better understand it, and we'd better respond to it obediently. And to put it in the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews: if you hear that voice—if that word is re-preached to you, if it is read to you, if it is stated to you—you'd better not harden your hearts against it just because you'd rather sin and do what you want.

Verse 7, Hebrews 3: "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says"—now quoting another Old Testament text from the Psalms—"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion"—this

is Hebrews 3:7—“on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.” Think about even today—if you read today’s reading—they’re coming out of the Exodus. They’ve just seen Moses do all these miraculous things with one staff in his hand. He’s calling plagues down on an entire nation. He says, “Let’s go into the desert because God wants us to go there.” They get out there, see the army approaching; they see the Red Sea in front of them; and they say, “Why did you bring us out here? Were there no graves in Egypt for us to be buried in? We’re all going to die here in the wilderness. Why would you do that to us?” And Moses has to rebuke—“You just saw: my words are not my words; they’re God’s words. It was authenticated by these miraculous signs. What are you saying? Trust me on this.” And God again does something miraculous and something amazing to prove that he’s speaking through Moses, who now is going to give a whole body of laws for the people of Israel.

He says, if you hear his voice, don’t test God. There—he said, verse 10—“I was provoked with that generation.” I said, “They always go astray in their hearts.” The issue of authority and recognizing ultimate authority is always something going on inside of your heart. You have to make that decision here in your life. “They have not known my ways.” They didn’t recognize them—at least they didn’t obey them. They didn’t want to listen to my voice. Verse 11: “As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.” And again, for them, it was getting into the Promised Land in Canaan—the land flowing with milk and honey—and they’re not going to make it.

“Take care, brothers”—now the pastoral exhortation—“lest there be in any of you”—now look at this description—“an evil, unbelieving heart.” And people think religious faith is about just believing something without any evidence—God never asks us to do that. Your belief or your confidence needs to be in prophets that are speaking the word with authentication. And if this is the case, then don’t disbelieve God—that’s going to lead you to fall away from the living God because you won’t respond to his voice. “But exhort one another,” verse 13, “every day, as long as it’s called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by”—and here’s the real problem—“the deceitfulness of sin.” See, the battle’s going on in our lives all the time—things I want to do, the ways I want to live my life. I look around and I hear the prophet—hear his message inscribed in Scripture. I often say, “I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to hear it. I don’t want to listen to it.” It’s one of the reasons it sounds so harsh to us—because we want to do our thing. And sin is constantly trying to deceive us—to say it’s worth it to disregard the voice of God. And he says, don’t do it.

“You’ve come to share in Christ”—completed tense, perfect tense—“if indeed we hold our original confidence firmly to the end.” There’s a lot of people that love to listen to the Bible only for a few years, and then they’re done with it. He says real Christianity—real sharing in Christ, real adoption into God’s family—is an original confidence held all the way to the end. “As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?” Verse 18: “And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest but to those who were disobedient?” “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”



What kind of belief? Belief that God was truly speaking—that God had really given information to them—that they were saying, “I don’t want to hear his voice. I don’t want to listen to that.” Recognize ultimate authority. Every single one of us makes that decision—not only in terms of a resolve at the beginning of our Christian life, or our rejection of Christianity—but you make that decision every day in your life: Am I going to listen to the word, or am I going to listen to the world? Am I going to listen to my intuition, or listen to the objective truth of the Bible—the recorded words of the prophets?

What is John’s message? Luke 3:3—I printed the whole passage for you; you can jump back into it—“The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness”—of all places, a marginal vessel out here. And here was his message: he went into all the region around the Jordan—the Jordan River, the Jordan Valley there—proclaiming a baptism—more on that later—of repentance. What’s this whole thing about dunking people into water symbolizing repentance—for the forgiveness of sins? Proclaiming “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”—proclaiming a baptism, calling people to get baptized—of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. That old message—hearing that my whole life. If you’re in the Old Testament, you see that from the beginning of the Bible: repentance, forgiveness; repentance, forgiveness; repentance—

“Well, that’s it, Pastor Mike. That was how it was in the Old Testament. That’s not how it is in the New Testament. It’s about grace in the New Testament; it’s not about repentance, right? You need to understand that we’ve changed everything.” I’m glad you brought that up—turn to Luke 24. That’s the end of the Gospel of Luke. The ministry of Christ begins with a messenger going before Christ, preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness. Christ does his ministry; he dies on a cross; he pays the penalty of sin—God causes him to suffer the payment as though he were the sinner so that me, the sinner, wouldn’t have to be judged by God. He rises from the dead to vindicate this whole transaction. Now, as a resurrected Christ, he’s about to ascend and give us at least 2,000 years to get this evangelistic job done, and he talks to these two guys on the road to Emmaus, and he starts talking about what this entire period of time is supposed to be characterized by. Here’s what he says, verse 45—it’s funny, he keeps going back to the Old Testament; that’s what he means by “the Scriptures” here: “He opened their minds”—this is Luke 24:45—“to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead’”—lots of predictive prophecies about that in the Bible—“and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” So—get at it. And that’s how Acts starts—get at it: “My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Bring what? The message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

You want to separate repentance from the gospel? You don’t have the gospel anymore. If you want to say, “Well, repentance—I can’t talk about repentance when I try to share the gospel with someone, because I know the gospel is about grace; it’s not about repentance; it’s not about good works.” Gotcha on that. Read those verses—believe that 100%. I do. Understand that our salvation



is not earned by our works. I get all that—I understand it. I’m all about the grace of God in saving us. We don’t earn it, right? We don’t merit favor from God. We’re not in any way building up brownie points so that God will love us. Nothing like that. See, but what the Bible always pairs together is forgiveness associated with repentance. Christ taught it. John the Baptist taught it. Isaiah taught it. Go with me real quickly—Isaiah 55. It’s everywhere in the Bible: the connection between a forgiving, compassionate God and repentance. My works do not save me—I get that—but my repentance is required so that I can be granted forgiveness. That’s how God operates. That’s what he’s always paired together in the Bible. And that’s what he’s calling us to do.

Isaiah 55—you want to talk about grace? Let’s start in verse 1: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat.” “Well, I’ve got no money; how can I buy it?” “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” That sounds free to you? Sounds free to me—free. “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread”—I know this is all poetic and lyrical, but think about it—“and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” That’s called sin. That’s the idea of wasting my life on stuff that I think is going to fulfill me—and it doesn’t. I need to come and really get this thing right—come to God; God will freely give it to me. How does it start? Listening to the prophets: “Listen diligently to me”—middle of verse 2—“and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” I’ll give it to you. You’ve got to incline your ear and come to me—“Hear, that your soul may live.” It starts with recognizing the authoritative voice of God. “And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David”—there becomes the paradigm, and actually the avenue, as predicted, that Christ would come and be that fulfillment of the promise of David’s Son on a throne. He describes that for a couple of verses.

Drop down now—verse 6—here’s the heart of the message, though: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God”—return to our God—“for he will abundantly pardon.” There’s the connection—always in the Bible: repentance and forgiveness.

Now, get this—in this text we get a sense of what it means. Look at verse 7: forsaking his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; turning now to God—that’s the word *shuv* in Hebrew: to turn, to return to God—that he may have compassion; and then I might be abundantly forgiven. **Turning**—let’s put it down that way. Number two—what’s the message of John the Baptist? Repentance and forgiveness. How does that—what is repentance? Here it comes. Number two: **turn from sin and obey God**. Very simple.

“Oh, there’s the obedience thing again. We’re not talking about—‘you can’t earn your salvation.’” I never said you could. I’m not saying that’s what the gospel says—that we have to earn our salvation—we don’t. But the gospel is: you have to repent. You must repent. You’ve got to turn from sin and obey God. Does the obeying in some way give me, you know, this quid pro quo of



purchasing God's favor? Absolutely not. It is free. God gives us free forgiveness. He gives it to those who are repentant—who turn from sin to God.

"Well, Mike, here's the problem. Obviously, you didn't go to school—you didn't learn, because my old pastor made it very clear: the problem with your whole statement about repentance being turning from sin to God is that that's not what the word means. See, my pastor told me that repentance is simply a synonym for faith. It's the same thing—just a different word; faith and repentance—same thing. Because my pastor—he knows Greek. And the Greek word, he told me, for repentance is a compound word of two Greek components. One is the word *meta*. *Metanoia* is the Greek word. *Meta* is a preposition which means 'after,' and *noia* is the noun based on the noun *nous* or the verb *noeō*—to think. To 'think after'—after-think. It means that you get to a place where you get some new information and you think differently after you encounter that information—you now change your mind. As a matter of fact, that's a good definition for repentance: changing your mind. And that's all there is. You come to some information about Christ and you trust him; you believe him; you change your mind about Christ." So, you know, my pastor knows that because he knows Greek. "You need to study your Greek, Pastor Mike, and then you would know: after-think—*metanoia*—means change your mind."

That's as silly as you trying to define English words that way. Is that the way you define English words? *Passage*—you know that word *passage*—is made up of two English words: *pass* and *age*—"pass age," *passage*. It means that when you get to—say, like—a birthday, you're just going to skip it—skip the age step. Passing on birthdays is what the word *passage* means. You think, "I'm getting older—I'm not; I'm passing on age—pass *passage*."

Hamlet—you know the word *hamlet*? Look at that—right? Little village in the mountains—that little hamlet. *Ham-let*: made up of two English words: "ham," right? You know what ham is. And "let"—you know that means "allow." It's the allowance of pork products, maybe in your home—letting ham—let the ham flow. *Hamlet*.

Awful—you know that word *awful*—made up of two English—"awe" and "full," right? Awe—wonder, reverence—full; full of reverence. "How you doing, Mike?" "Awful." I'm full of awe—full of wonder.

You can play Greek word games all you want, okay, but every Greek word, every Hebrew word, every Aramaic word, every English word has to be defined by its usage. And the usage of the Greek word *metanoia* is given to us over and over and over again in the New Testament as turning from sin to God. That's how it was used in the armies—when an army was marching one direction and they wanted to turn the armies around, they would yell out the word *metanoia*. And it didn't mean, "Hey, change your mind." It meant, "Turn around."



One of the Greek words that is often put together with the word *metanoia* is *apostrophō*. Now there's no debate about the word *apostrophō*—what that means. It means that I would forsake and turn—that's the idea. Sometimes it's translated "turn" because it's clearly leaving one path and going on the other. We see passages that have the words, for instance, "repent and turn to God." There's our word *metanoia* and *apostrophō*, just to make that clear connection.

In our passage—we're reading Isaiah 55—when you get to a word like, in verse 7 there, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD"—there's the word *shuv* in Hebrew. If you get a Greek Old Testament—that's the Septuagint—when they ran into the word *shuv*, they would put the word *metanoia*. They understood that *shuv* always meant to turn around. And the word "forsake" there—*azav* in Hebrew—is the word "to let the old thing go and to turn around to the new thing"—turning away and turning toward. *Metanoia*, *apostrophō*, *shuv*—those words clearly mean a redirection of your orientation away from sin and to God. To what? To obey God—to do what he says.

The essence of the message of John the Baptist was: repent. What does that mean? Stop sinning and start obeying. Turn from your sin, forsake it, and cling to God and do what he says. It's so clear in the Bible—you can't get around it. You need to define these words by their usage.

We don't have time to look at this, but at some point you should study a passage like 2 Corinthians chapter 7 when it describes repentance as including things like sorrow over my sin; an earnestness to do the right thing; an indignation over my error; fear about continuing consequences for doing evil; longing; and an eagerness to prove myself innocent. Paul wrote the Corinthians and rebuked them for sin. He praises them in 2 Corinthians for repenting, using all of these words to describe—"You know what, you got me; I'm guilty; but now I'm going to prove myself innocent." It wasn't that they disagreed with the indictment; it's that they said, "I'm no longer going to do that. I'm turning from sin to God." Keyword in that passage—repentance, repentance, repentance.

Some people want to say, "You know what, I don't want to talk about repentance; I want to talk about faith in Christ. I want to talk about faith in Christ." But you cannot talk about the gospel unless you're dealing with the issue of turning from sin to God and putting your trust in Jesus Christ. You hear it around here, I hope, all the time: repentance and faith; repentance and faith; repentance and faith. That's what the response to the gospel is. I'm tired of the shorthand—we like to talk about all these, you know, saying prayers and "asking Jesus in our heart" and "walking aisles." I'm done with all that—let's use the biblical vocabulary to talk about what God has sent his word to proclaim as a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.



If you want to put this visually in your mind, the picture is a road sign of a U-turn. Just picture that: U-turn. Most people see Christianity as a different road sign: the merging sign. You see the merging sign? And that merging sign feels really good—because God is going to come alongside of you and, you know, live your life with you. It'll be like—I don't know—"Footprints in the Sand" or something. Yeah, sorry. Maybe he'll come along and he'll just help you live your life. And if we were in a big Houston church, we might put it this way: "You can have your best life now," okay? Because God is going to come along and fulfill all your desires. He's going to let you—he's going to be your personal spiritual Tony Robbins to get you to that next level of all your dreams and hopes. There's no talk about, "Hey, your dreams and hopes are wrong," right? There's no talk about turning from sin and turning to God. We don't want to talk about sin. We don't want to talk about judgment.

That's what the gospel is all about—it's about us receiving the free forgiveness of God by repenting of our sins and trusting in Christ's provision. It's not a merging sign. This is not an "I love you just the way you are; now don't go changing to try and please me," right? That's not how it works. It's about you and I recognizing that what we do—even naturally—what we do is moving in the opposite direction.

Let me prove it. You still have Isaiah 55 open—we didn't finish that. Verse 8—here are some very familiar words to you that we always rip out of context; let's put them back in context: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." What's the context of this? Read verse 7 again: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." For the LORD—we need to understand—doesn't have thoughts like yours; he doesn't have ways like yours. His ways are different, and what he's asking you to do is to get onto his path. A lot of people like to see Christianity as the merging of God into your life—he'll help you, right? So there's some merging going on. He's not merging into your life; you're supposed to merge into his life, and he's going the opposite direction—because his ways are not your ways and his thoughts are not your thoughts. You need to think his thoughts and move in his ways and go his direction. That's a U-turn—that's called repentance. That's turning around.

Not surprising, then—John the Baptist asking them to get baptized. This is a picture of stepping out from the crowd and recognizing that whatever was in the past is wrong; I need to move in this direction. More on that another time—we don't have time for it today. I put one little book on the back if you need desperately to deal with this topic now—it's a little, tiny book that we use when people are getting baptized here at our church—Dyer's book. I love the subtitle: "The Christian's First Obedience," I think is what it's called. That's all it is—turning from sin to God. What's the first thing God asks us to do? Get baptized. Why? Because that saves us? No—any more than repenting or doing good works saves us. But it's something he's asking us to do to show that now I'm following the cues of God—even if they seem odd, even if they seem weird, even if they seem marginal—this whole getting into water, being baptized. There's a lot more to it—we'll look at that,



perhaps not today, as we move through the study of John the Baptist—how it relates to the washings of the Old Testament and how it contrasts with Christian baptism that Jesus imposes later. Turning from sin to obey God is the essence—the summary—of John’s ministry.

Now, the quotation—Luke 3 is printed on your worksheet there, verses 4 through 6—he is quoting, just like Matthew, Mark, and John, from Isaiah 40. And here’s what he says, “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.”’” Now remember, as we get into pictures of valleys being filled in and mountains and everything else, what did chapter 1, verse 17 say? What are we really preparing—geography? No. People—people that are prepared. This is all flowery, poetic—biblical, albeit—but poetic language: preparing the way of the Lord because he’s coming, right? That was the picture of a path being laid out for a king coming. But the picture of being changed—that’s us. We need to be changed. Every valley—be filled in. If it’s a little flat over here—bring it up. If it’s a mountain up here and it shouldn’t be there—bring it low. A crooked thing—make it straight. The rough places—make them level. Because then God’s going to show up, and “all flesh will see the salvation of God.”

That’s a picture out of Isaiah 40, and every single Gospel writer ties John’s ministry back to that. He was preparing—why? Because that’s what the messenger from Malachi was said to be—someone going before to get people ready.

Okay. Now here’s the picture: when Christ comes, he’s not going to set up an unrighteous world; he’s going to set up a righteous one. He’s not going to set up one that allows you to do what you want; he’s going to set up one to have you do what you were designed to do—and that is the will of God. You will not be the center of the universe—Christ will be the center. John’s ministry of repentance is to get people ready to live in a Christ-centered world. Let’s picture it that way—this whole idea of mountains and valleys and crooked made straight. Number three: **preparing people for a Christ-centered world**. That’s what the future holds. When God arrives—that’s what’s going to be.

Now, you’re thinking, “Well, wait a minute—he arrived; that’s not what we have.” I get it. Here’s the surprise for all the Old Testament prophecy buffs: God was going to come in human form not once, but twice. The advent—or the coming—of Christ and the Messiah was not going to happen where he comes and then that’s it. He’s going to come—surprise most of us—by leaving, being gone for 2,000 years at least, and then coming back and finishing the job in two parts. Why? Because he’s collecting a kingdom full of people that are repentant—prepared. Therefore, the preparation before the first coming of Christ is very parallel to what we’re doing now. For 2,000 years, we’ve got the same message—Jesus said, carry on the message of John the Baptist: repentance for forgiveness of sins—because you’re preparing people for the coming of God. And at the second coming, he’s not going to tolerate all the sin in the world. He’s now going to put up—as Zechariah said—the world so centered around the glory of God that even the bells on the bridle of



the horses in the kingdom will say, inscribed on them, “Holy to the LORD.” Everything will be about Christ. That is what John wanted to prepare people for.

And here’s the deal: Christ came—one installment—surprised us all by leaving for 2,000 years at least. Second installment—we’re living between the advents. And we’re called to do the same thing: get as many people ready as possible; have our lives ready to live in that reality.

Let me show it to you from Malachi. We would be remiss if we didn’t at least look at the two passages that Jesus quotes and the angel Gabriel quotes to describe John’s ministry. Look at how clear it is in the Old Testament text. Malachi—it sounds hard to find; it’s not. Go to Matthew, turn back one book, and there it is. Two chapters and you’ll be in Malachi 3.

These will be familiar—we’ve already read these this morning from New Testament texts. Malachi 3:1—this is the one Jesus quoted when the disciples asked him about John the Baptist. He quotes this text: “Behold”—Malachi 3:1, did you find it?—“I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.” That’s the pronouns we’ve got to figure out. The Lord is coming—yes, the Lord is coming—the day of the Lord, which comes in two installments (we didn’t recognize that). “But he’s coming, and he’s going to send his messenger. And the Lord”—little verse 1—“whom you seek—you want him—he’ll suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—behold, he is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” We’ve got a problem—got sinful people and a holy Lord showing up. That’s a problem. “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver; and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner”—they’re not hospitable—“and do not fear me,” to put it all under one category, says the LORD of hosts.

Look at that now. The people who are in the covenant, if you will—the people that are God’s people—need to be reformed; they need to be changed; they need to be holy; they need to be able to live pure lives. The sinners—judged. The unrepentant—judged.

Chapter 4—Malachi 4:1, very short chapter—he says, “Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven.” Wow—wait a minute; that’s not what happened. Didn’t seem like that’s what happened. “And all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” You’re telling me when Christ comes there won’t be any—righteous people left? “Neither root nor branch”—



they're not going to re-sprout. He didn't seem to accomplish that on the first coming—I get that. He didn't. Two installments to this. The messenger came before the first installment; Christ has the second part of this to still accomplish.

And the text says, “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.” He’s going to fix you. “You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall, and you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the LORD of hosts. “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.” The prophet—the servant—giving the message. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet”—that’s what Gabriel said of John: he would be coming in the spirit and power of Elijah—“before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come”—now this is a very important phrase, just to underline the last phrase of the Old Testament—“and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Now, those last two verses clearly apply to John the Baptist’s ministry—coming before the Lord showed up. The Lord didn’t show up in utter judgment until the second coming, when he then does destroy all evildoers who are unrepentant. At the first coming, though, the ministry of him turning hearts around—clearly talked about repeatedly in John the Baptist’s ministry. Why? So that when he comes there will be people prepared. Because if there were no people prepared—“decree of utter destruction”—there’d be nothing here that God is aligned with. He’s got to be aligned with people that are repentant—ready to do the will of God. He needs soft, repentant hearts—people that are ready to do the will of God. That’s the ministry of John the Baptist.

That’s the future. The future is a Christ-centered world—the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (I know I quote that all the time). God and his Christ set up their kingdom, and he’ll reign forever and ever. You are to get ready now for that. I know it sounds almost trite, right? But we talk about the Lord coming back and every knee bowing, every tongue confessing—heaven, earth, under the earth. The goal for us now is to repent so that he rules and reigns in our lives now—to where we look to Tiberius or Annas and Caiaphas, Lysanias, or whoever the leaders are in our lives, and we say, “My ultimate leadership belongs to the Lord.”

One last passage—with this we’ll close—2 Peter chapter 3. 2 Peter chapter 3—a **people prepared**. Are you prepared?

Speaking of that—we were flipping through the channels; my kids came across *Doomsday Preppers* and made me watch a whole episode. Have you watched the show? If you’re feeling like maybe you’re a little weird, watch this show and you’ll feel a lot better about your life, okay? This is like the apex of weirdness in our country—the doomsday preppers. Now, I know we’re in



earthquake country—hopefully you’ve got a few bucks tucked away in some drawers somewhere so when the ATMs go down and, you know, you’ve got some extra water in the garage or something—maybe a few extra cans of Rosarita beans and, I don’t know, SpaghettiOs—whatever—you’re ready for a few days of the stores being down.

These guys—if you watch this: bunkers, air-purifying systems, wells. They’re living in containers under the earth, gleefully talking about how many megaton bombs can go off and they’re going to be fine. “Our grandkids can breed in the back room there; we can repopulate—respawn—the earth.” Weirdos, right? Doomsday preppers. They are ready.

Got that image in your mind? 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient”—why hasn’t he brought this thing to an end? Why not all that Malachi 3 and 4 stuff—why hasn’t it happened yet? “He is not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” Two wills of God—you understand that? The desire of God and the decreed will of God—not everyone will come to repentance, but he desires that all come to repentance—that’s what he’d prefer. Repentance. Interestingly enough, how do we spare ourselves from this coming day of judgment? Repentance.

“But the day of the Lord”—it’s going to come. “I thought he already came.” Well, that was the beginning—that was installment one. The one that really is going to be cataclysmic has yet to happen. “It’ll come like a thief, and the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved; and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be”—now that, by the way, would be a great NatGeo *Doomsday Preppers* line—just a theme, right? “If everything’s going to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?” Well, yeah—to have big bunkers and air purifiers and years’ worth of food. That’s not what the Bible says about us doomsday preppers. If this is all going to end this way, what sort of people ought you to be? The Bible says two things: you’ve got to be stocked up on **holiness** and **godliness**. Like, that’s all that’s going to matter on that day. We don’t want to survive it, by the way, right? You don’t want to crawl out like a cockroach when this thing is done. What matters is that you have righteousness and godliness—because that’s the new kingdom; it’s going to be all about that—“waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.” “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

Christ-centered world’s coming. Are you Christ-centered now? That’s all that really matters. Trusting in Christ for salvation—fantastic, yes; we do. Praise him for grace—yes. Repentant—stocking up on holiness and godliness.



My subtitle for this morning's message may have struck you a little bit—may have brought a hymn to your mind that's been popular. 170 years ago there was a hymn written—"Just As I Am"—became really popular, obviously, in Billy Graham's evangelistic crusades—and a great song with great lyrics. "Just as I am," because we come to Christ with our sin—that's what we bring to the transaction, right? "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me; and that Thou bid'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come." "Just as I am, and waiting not, to rid my soul of one dark blot; to Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come." Great lines, great lyrics—important. We come to God with nothing but our sin. We want his forgiveness.

Interestingly enough, J. C. Ryle lived over 100 years ago when the song was a lot younger. He quoted this song in a sermon he preached on repentance—in fact, I provided the link for you if you want to find it on your Kindle. On the back—Ryle, J. C., *Repentance*. You can get it on Kindle; you can get it for free on the internet—it's out there. He quotes this hymn over 100 years ago in his sermon, and he quotes it favorably—as I just did. Good lines, good lyrics—important. We come just as we are. He rhetorically asked in the sermon this question: "Do you ask me whether there is anything else you ought to do but come to him just as you are?" "Yes," I reply, he says—"Go and resolve to break off every known sin. Let them call such advice legalistic—let them do it. I trust I shall never shrink from giving it. It can never be right to sit still in wickedness. It can never be wrong to say with Isaiah, 'Cease to do evil.' Whatever be your sin, resolve that by God's help tomorrow morning you will wake and rise an altered man. Break off from that sin—do it. Give it up today without delay. Turn from it, that by God's help you may stay away from it for the rest of your days."

We come to Christ just as we are—but "just as you are" can't stay that way. Repentance is a call for you to forsake whatever your secret sin, whatever your known sin, whatever your habitual sin—whatever you do that doesn't reflect what you know you ought to do as it relates to the holiness and godliness that the Bible is actually asking us to display. Repent—and put your confidence in a Christ who can empower you to live a different life.

That may sound harsh in a day that doesn't like to be told things like that, but it is the best news of all as we prepare our lives and our families for the Christ-centered world that's around the corner.

So stand with me, please, you doomsday preppers, and let's stock up this week on some holiness and godliness.

Let's pray. God, help us, please, take your word at face value—to recognize the long-standing, centuries-long connection between your forgiveness and our repentance. Let us recognize it's not just the call that begins our Christian life; it's something that every day we experience as we see new sin in our lives or we fall to old sin. We want to repent—turn from sin and obey you. Let us



always be clear—as I’ve tried to be in this message—we don’t earn our salvation, but clearly you ask the forgiven to be repentant people. So let us this week, as we prepare for a new home where righteousness will dwell and Christ will be exalted at the very center of that place, let us store up and stock up this week on a life of more holiness and godliness for your glory, for your name’s sake. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.