

Rejoice! Christ Is Coming Soon!

Luke 3: 7-18

Introduction: In November of 1985, a volcano erupted near Armero, Columbia and covered the city in ash and mud. This tragedy claimed the lives of more than 20,000 people. But what makes it a tragedy is everything that happened before the eruption.

More than a year before the eruption, plumes of smoke started seeping out of this mountain in the Columbian jungle. Three months prior, the mountain began rumbling and spitting showers of rock and ash. Warnings were issued, maps were prepared and distributed showing the likely path that any volcanic flow would take. The tragedy is that people did not respond to the warnings. They took their chances and became victims. None of them had to die.

Another, even greater tragedy. People had become wicked, and every inclination of man's heart was only evil all the time. A certain man received a warning, and believed that the predicted punishment would come true. In complete trust, he followed directions and saved his family. We read in Hebrews 11 verse 7 – “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

There are two ways to take a warning. You can ignore it, or you can believe it. Rejoice! Christ is Coming Soon. Live a Life of Repentance, and Look Forward to the End.

I. Live a life of Repentance

In our reading for today, we see John the Baptist preaching to the crowds who came looking for him. John's mission was to prepare people's hearts for Jesus' message of free forgiveness. He preached a message of repentance to prepare the people to hear the gospel.

The question then begs to be answered, what is true repentance? The first part is sorrow over sin. More than just feeling guilty for getting caught, this is called contrition. This is a sorrow that leads us to trust in God's forgiveness, without anyone else even knowing. The second part is a desire to change. Wanting to leave that sin behind, and live a God-pleasing life.

So, these people came out to the desert to hear John, and they heard this message of repentance. At this point, the people have already been convicted of their sin, and asked for God's forgiveness. Now, they want to know ways in which they can show God their thankfulness. John instructs them how to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Luke sets forth 3 groups that ask John for guidance in their lives of repentance: the crowd in general, tax collectors and soldiers. John gives them each an example of fruits that show genuine repentance.

John instructs the crowd to share with the needy. **Verse 11 - John answered, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.** This is a good way to show Christian love to people who need help. During this time, the Roman government did not have any sort of social program to look out for orphans or widows, so these people were all alone, especially in the absence of help from family or relatives.

Next, some tax collectors ask for direction in doing their job in a God-pleasing way. John tells them to work honestly. They should not use their position as an opportunity to rob people, but they should collect only as much as they are instructed.

Then some soldiers asked John what they should do to show their thankfulness. John tells them that they should be content with their pay. Soldiers were known for being willing to do anything for the right price. John tells these men that the root problem was their constant thirst for more money, and the willingness to do anything to get it.

In each of these cases, John the Baptist encourages the groups that came to him to show their repentance with their stewardship of God's gifts. John underscores the point that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So, what does John have to say to us today? What are the sins that we struggle with each day, that characterize us? Do we hang on to sinful practices instead of desiring to change? Each Christian should look at their own heart and life, and ask these serious questions. Is our contrition genuine sorrow over that sin, or is it regretting that we got caught? Do our fruits give honest testimony to our lives of repentance? We are playing with fire if we think that we can play with sin, and think that it will not affect us.

Maybe the area that deserves our attention is our stewardship. If you look at yourself and your conscience tells you that you are greedy, dishonest and dissatisfied, then you should know that you cannot serve both God and money (Mt. 6:24). If you look at yourself and see that the fruit you produce is not in keeping with repentance, then you should know that there is no placating God, trying to go half-way on repentance. We deserve to face punishment for the things that we've done, and by nature we have earned God's wrath.

But the Greater One, to whom John pointed, has come. Jesus never went half-way in anything. He came all the way to earth, became fully human. He bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He dealt with temptations as great as any we will ever see, but he overcame. He went all the way, from the cradle to the cross. He was 100% your Savior the whole time. Jesus walked that road for you. He was generous with what he had to give: himself and his time. He was honest, and came to spread the truth of God's Loving plan of forgiveness. He was content with his role in that plan.

Jesus came and preached full and free forgiveness for all people. Through his death on the cross, he paid for all the sins of all time. Jesus paid the price for you.

And now, Jesus directs our lives of repentance. The message that John the Baptist was preparing people to hear was one of Christian love. You see, Christ does not love as the world loves. The world loves something because of what that thing offers, like an investment. It only loves if the return is greater than the effort put in. But Christian love overflows from a heart of thanks. God has shown us His Great Love through His Son, and now that love overflows to all, no matter whether they are friend or enemy. Jesus tells us to love especially our enemies, because they need that love the most.

When we live our life as one of true repentance, we are constantly reminded of the great love that was shown to us, and our love pours out in all directions.

Transition: Brothers and sisters, the entire life of a Christian is one of repentance. John brought word of the coming wrath, and warned the people to prepare their hearts. Like the story of the volcano and the flood, it is wise to heed the warning that is given.

As we live our lives of repentance, it's like driving a car. If we would focus on what is immediately in front of us, without an eye on what is coming down the road, we still would not be prepared for much, would we? The focus of the Christian life is split between the everyday, and looking forward to the end.

John prepared the people for the coming of Jesus' ministry, we need to be prepared for Christ's second coming in power. We rejoice, and look forward to the End.

II. Look Forward to the End

John's words to the crowds still ring true today, as we have seen. John gives the further warning not to rest on supposed laurels. He says to the people - **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 people in John's day thought that they had everything taken care of because they were descendants of Abraham. The reality is that membership in a family, or even a church family, does not save us. Maybe this thought has never crossed your mind, but it's something that deserves to be said. The membership list at Faith is not the Book of Life. We are gathered here as a church family to walk together in our worship and in carrying out the Great Commission to take the Gospel into all the world.

So, we do not rest on our laurels, we rest on the promises of Christ. Church membership does not save us, but membership in the Family of God does. Paul says in his letter to the Galatians - **⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** An inheritance is given freely; it is not earned. We are members of God's family through faith in his promises.

The End holds nothing to fear for the Christian. When you stand before the Almighty Judge, his judgment will be a confirmation of your faith. All the things that we have been waiting for will be done, and the separation that John talks about in our reading will take place. John says of Christ, **"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."** This is a picture of the separation that will take place on Judgment Day. This winnowing fork was used to throw the wheat and straw, which had been trampled, into the air. The chaff would blow away, but the heavier kernels of wheat would fall back to the ground. Those who do not believe in Christ will go to the eternal fire and punishment prepared for them. Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior will go to be with him in Heaven. This is the end and goal of our faith, and a day that we wait for with joy. There is no need to fear for those who trust in God's promises.

So, as we see the Day approaching, we look to carry out our mission to tell others. Verse 18 says, **"With many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them."** This verse is a summary of John's actions, and we are encouraged to do the same. Give to the spiritually needy that which they need the most. Give the gift of eternal life, by sharing the Good News about Jesus our Savior.

Conclusion: Brothers and sisters, Christ is coming soon. When we stand before our Lord on his Judgment Seat, it will be a day of rejoicing, not of sorrow. May we always live our lives with the proper focus on the everyday, but to look to the End with Rejoicing. Christ is Coming Soon. Amen.