

## **John Preaches Good News**

Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; **Luke 3:10-20**

And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.” As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. (English Standard Version – ESV)

### **Background:**

- The poorest were peasants with one outer tunic; thus, those with two had more than enough. “What shall we do?” occurs throughout Luke-Acts as a question about how to be saved.
- Tax gatherers sometimes collected extra money and kept the profit. Although the practice was not legal, it was difficult to prevent.
- Some commentators think these “soldiers” are Jewish police who accompanied tax gatherers or Herodian mercenaries; more likely, they are the light auxiliary non-Jewish troops recruited from Syria by Rome. Although Roman legions were stationed in Syria, not Palestine, some soldiers were stationed in Palestine (Caesarea and Jerusalem), while the smaller units marched through. Jews were exempt from required military service, especially because of their strict dietary laws. Soldiers were known for extorting money from local people they intimidated or falsely accused.
- A slave (unlike a disciple, who also served a master) carried the master’s sandals. By saying that he is not fit to untie Messiah’s sandal, John says that he is unworthy to be Christ’s slave.
- Winnowing was familiar to all Palestinian Jews, especially farmers. As harvested wheat was tossed into the air, the wind would separate the heavier grain from the lighter chaff, which was useless for consumption and usually burned. Some writers described the Day of Judgment as a harvest (Jeremiah 51:33; Joel 3:12-14) and the wicked as chaff (Isaiah 17:13; Jeremiah 13:24; 15:7). The “unquenchable” nature of that kind of fire points beyond the momentary burning of chaff to something far more horrible (Isaiah 66:24), in spite of the fact that Jewish tradition itself was far from unanimous concerning the duration of hell.

- The Old Testament prophets declared that in the end time the righteous would be endowed with the Holy Spirit, and that the wicked would be burned with fire. Jews generally viewed the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy, and some viewed the Spirit as a force that purified God's people.

- In ancient Israel prophets normally enjoyed an immunity from persecution that was virtually unparalleled in the ancient Near East. Yet, some Israelite rulers did imprison (1 Kings 22:26-27; Jeremiah 37:1-38) and seek to kill or silence them (1 Kings 13:4; 18:13; 19:2; 2 Kings 1:9; 6:31; 2 Chronicles 24:21; Jeremiah 18:18, 23; 26:11, 20-23). John's preaching to Herod Antipas fits prophetic morality, but Herod and his advisers may view it as a political statement, especially given the political cost of Herod's illicit liaison with Herodias.

### **Questions:**

- + What do all of John's answers to the three questions asked of him have in common?  
What is significant about the similarity of his answers, and how do they apply today?  
How do you think John might have responded if you asked him, "What shall I do?"
- + Why were the people in expectation, and why did they think John might be the Christ?  
Describe John's character based on his response to those who supposed him to be Christ.
- + Luke quotes John as saying, "I baptize you with water," but Matthew adds "for repentance."  
Do you think it is necessary or unnecessary that "for repentance" be added? Explain why.
- + What does John mean by saying, "he [Christ] will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire?"  
Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit? If so, how has that experience affected you?
- + What does John mean by saying, "the chaff he [Christ] will burn with unquenchable fire?"  
In what way or ways is "unquenchable fire" part of the "good news" that John preached?  
What are the essential elements of the "good news," and who needs to hear it from you?
- + Why would John risk his ministry by speaking against Herod about a personal matter?  
Should the public know about the personal affairs of political figures? Why or why not?  
How would you respond to someone who exposed your personal life to others?