Part 2 of 8 Gospel According to St. Luke - Fr. Herman November 1, 2026

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. >> Amen
Christ is among us >> He is and ever shall be.

Today we are continuing our eight-part series on the Gospel according to St. Luke. This is our second installment. And the title of this message today is “The voice in the wilderness and the spirit of God.” Last Sunday, Simeon proclaimed Jesus as God's salvation, a light for the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel. Yet he also warned that this child Jesus would become a sign spoken against a stumbling block for many. In Luke chapters 3 and 4, that warning begins to unfold. John the Baptist appears in the wilderness, calling the people to repentance. Jesus is baptized, led by the spirit into the wilderness and then returns to Galilee where he announces his mission at Nazareth. Luke connects these events through God's prophetic Word. So today we will consider **three** things. **First**, John's proclamation of that Word and the call to repentance. **Second**, Jesus obedience to scripture and the mission it declares. And **third**, the rejection of God's Word in Nazareth, the prophetic call to repentance.

Luke begins the chapter three by naming Rome's rulers and Jerusalem's religious authorities. Yet, God's Word comes to none of them. Instead, the Word of God came to John, the son of Zachariah, in the wilderness in Luke 3:2 (Fr. Herman points to the Icon of St. John the Baptist). These words recall Israel's prophets, especially Jeremiah. God's Word does not, you see, depend upon kings or priests. It comes to the prophet who must proclaim that message whether it is received or not. John announces repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The Gospel writer Luke quotes from Isaiah chapter 40. Prepare the way of the Lord. And he concludes with and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Notice the words, “all flesh.” God's salvation reaches to Gentiles and Jews alike. John also warns in his message and in his proclamation that ancestry offers no protection against judgment. He says, "Do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father." For God is able, from these stones, to raise up children to Abraham. He calls people to repentance. The Greek Word μετάνοια (metánoia) translated “repentance” involves a change of mind demonstrated by one's conduct. It is a translation of a Hebrew word תְּשׁוּבָה (tshuva) which means to return home.

And the only true home that any believers has is God. John commands those who listen to him to repent and go home. What does this look like? Well, John commands those with food and clothing to share. He tells tax collectors to stop overcharging. And he tells soldiers that they must stop extorting people and casting out false accusations against those who are weaker than they are. This is all in Luke 3:10-14. You see, for John, for the

Bible altogether, repentance is not merely sorrow. It is a changed life which is meant to bear **visible** fruit. You will know them by their fruits! Now John's proclamation of course confronts us today. Religious ancestry, church membership and familiarity with scripture cannot replace obedience. Our age very frequently, doesn't it, Treats identity as a substitute for conduct. Put a label on it and we know what it's about. No, don't believe the labels. We define ourselves by nationality, political allegiance, religion, or cultural heritage as though these establish our righteousness. They do not. So, as I've said before, when you get to the day of judgment, don't say you're Orthodox. You will be excluded because he does not judge by labels. John recognizes no exception to this repentance. **God examines the fruit we bear, not the labels we claim**. **Are we willing to change when scripture exposes our misconduct**? **When it exposes our wrongdoing**? John the Baptist believed so. John prepares the way by proclaiming God's Word and calling for repentance.

Turning back to God, Jesus then in the narrative enters the wilderness where his obedience to that same Word is tested. So we move now to the authority of God's Word through the Holy Spirit. Following his baptism, Jesus is said to be full of the Holy Spirit and led into the wilderness for 40 days. Luke 4:1-2. This recalls Israel's 40 years in the wilderness and Moses 40 days on the mountain (Deuteronomy 8 and Exodus 24). And when tempted, Jesus responds by quoting scripture. Urged to turn stone into bread by Satan, he replies, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” Deuteronomy 8, offered the world's kingdoms. He answers, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve,” from Deuteronomy 6 verse13. Finally, the devil himself quotes scripture urging Jesus to throw himself down from the temple because God's anointed and elect will be preserved on angels wings. This is from Psalm 91:11112. But Jesus responds, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God,” quoting Moses. Again, notice here, however, that even the devil quotes scripture. Repeating biblical Words does not mean obeying them. Scripture, of course, we know in our modern world very well, can be twisted to serve ambition or power. But Jesus refuses to use God's Word for his own advantage. Returning to Galilee, Jesus is in the power of the spirit. It says, "And Jesus enters the synagogue at Nazareth and he reads from Isaiah, ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.’" This is Luke 4:18. He's quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2. The passage continues with release to captives, sight being given to the blind, liberty being bestowed upon the oppressed, and the acceptable year of the Lord. Jesus declares after this lengthy reading, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In the wilderness, Jesus refused to make scripture serve his own desires. And at Nazareth, he announces the mission scripture has given him. Scripture is not a collection of quotations supporting whatever we already believe. It is God's instruction demanding obedience. Even biblical Words can be manipulated to justify ambition, power or hostility. It can be used to foster and undergird the false nationality of our modern world.

But Jesus shows that quoting scripture and obeying it are different things.

Will we submit our positions to what God has spoken? Will we follow the Baptist toward repentance? Will we follow Jesus who himself submitted to the sacred text of Moses? Yes, Jesus obeyed God's Word and proclaimed its fulfillment.

But fulfilled scripture is not necessarily welcomed by everyone. At Nazareth, His proclamation provokes opposition. So, we turn to the rejection of God's Word at Nazareth in the synagogue. At first, those in the synagogue who hear the Words of Jesus marvel at his Words, but they then ask, "Is not this Joseph's son?" in Luke 4:22. They know his family and expect him to act according to their expectations. Jesus anticipates their demand that he perform in his hometown the works they have heard he accomplished elsewhere. He then declares no prophet is acceptable in his own country. Jesus recalls two events here from Israel's scriptures. During Elijah's day when famine afflicted the land, the prophet was sent to a widow at Zeraphath in Sidon. This is first Kings 17 8- 24. During Elijah's days, non the Syrian was cleansed, although many lepers lived in Israel. This is 2 Kings 5. Both were Gentiles. God's prophetic Word brought mercy beyond Israel. Jesus, however, is not introducing something foreign to scripture. He reminds his hearers of what their own scriptures teach and proclaim that God is concerned for the whole world. Neither ancestry nor proximity to the prophet gives anyone exclusive claim on God's mercy. The response to Jesus preaching is immediate. The synagogue congregation becomes enraged, drives Jesus from the town, and attempts to throw him off the cliff, but he passes through their midst - Luke 4:28-30.

Those who have just heard Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled attempt to destroy the one proclaiming it. Their rejection anticipates what's coming in Jerusalem where Jesus opponents will seek his death. Nazareth warns us against welcoming scripture when it confirms our expectations, but rejecting it when we're challenged by it. We may recognize, for example, injustice against those we consider our own while overlooking the sufferings of others. And of course, I've heard many times, “Oh, throughout the world, Christians are being persecuted.” Well, I can tell you today there are many other people who are not Christians that are being persecuted and put to death unjustly. Jesus confronts this selective concern. God's mercy cannot be restricted by our boundaries. We must hear his Word even when it challenges our loyalties. So from John's proclamation to Jesus rejection, Luke shows that God's Word announces salvation for all while at the same time exposing those unwilling to obey.

So today we have considered three things. **First**, John proclaims repentance and forgiveness. God's salvation, after all, reaches all flesh, and repentance must bear fruit. **Second**, Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, obeys scripture. He refuses its misuse in the wilderness and announces its fulfillment in Nazareth. **Third**, Nazareth rejects Jesus when he reminds his hearers that God's mercy extends beyond their community. This

anticipates, of course, his rejection in Jerusalem. Brothers and sisters, God's Word belongs to the Lord who has spoken it. It does not belong to those who claim possession of it. **It demands obedience from everyone who hears**. Next Sunday, we will hear Jesus call his disciples and teach with authority. May we too bear fruits worthy of repentance, obey God's Word, and receive the mercy he intends to give toward all people.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit >> Amen
Christ is among us >> He is and ever shall be.
Help us, save us, have mercy upon us, and keep us, oh God, by thy grace

Link to Sermon - https://youtu.be/ER6xe7s3kd0?t=5283