



Prepare the Way of the Lord

Luke Series # 9

Luke 3

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I invite you now to turn in your Bible to Luke 3. Let me pray as we go to God's Word together.

Our God, You truly are marvelous. You truly are wonderful. You truly are more than amazing. And You are enough. Together now as Your people, we seek Your face through the ministry of Your Word. God, Your Word is a lamp to our feet. It is a light to our path. God, we pray that as we come to this text that this light would shine, focused in on the Person of Jesus Christ, and that You would show Him to us through Your Word that we might truly glory in our Redeemer. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

One week from today the President of the United States will be sworn in for his next term. And one week from tomorrow all the parties and all the regalia that go with the inauguration—all the pomp and circumstance—will take place. They will be preparing for this event in a big way in Washington, D.C., as they do every time it happens. In fact, preparations have already gone on for weeks. The parade route has been set and barricades have been put up and stands have been built so people can watch. The invitations to the parties have been sent out and tuxes have been cleaned and evening gowns have been purchased. Everybody is preparing for the President's next term.

Can you imagine what it would be like if we lived in a monarchy? If we had a king or a queen? How excited and how elaborate would our American celebrations be if we were crowning a king or a queen next week? They would be, I'm sure, as equal as they will be in Britain when the next king of England is crowned, presumably Prince Charles. The celebration will be grand, as it was when his mother, Queen Elizabeth, ascended to the crown in 1953 when they took a full 16 months to prepare for her ascending to the throne. And it's right to do that because when royalty arrives, one must be ready. One must be prepared.

In our study thus far of the Gospel of Luke, the author has left us no doubt about the royal identity of the main character of this story. He's already told us in the words of the archangel to the King's mother Mary that this One "*will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.*" He's going to be royalty. He's going to be the promised Messiah. "*He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*" There will not be another king like this King.

In our text, Luke provides us with the royal pedigree for this King—for King Jesus, the Messiah—in verses 23 through 38 in the form of a genealogy. You might remember a couple of Christmases ago we studied the genealogy in the book of Matthew. They're very similar, except Matthew begins at the very beginning and works his way forward toward Jesus; whereas Luke's genealogy begins with Jesus and works its way backward.

But backwards or forwards, the point is still the same: Jesus is royalty. He is the royal Messiah, the promised Son of David. Now, I hope I don't disappoint anyone with the fact that I'm not going to read the whole genealogy. But I do want to point out a couple things that point to Jesus' royal status.

First, He is the promised Son of David. Look in verse 31. The last four words: Jesus is "*the son of David.*" He is the promised Messiah. God had promised through the prophet Nathan to David that one day there would be a King, a son, from his own descendants, who would rule on his throne in righteousness and peace and justice forever and ever over God's people. Luke is making sure there would be no questions about His ancestry—this is He. This is the royal One. This Jesus is the Messiah.

But more than that, look at verse 38. Jesus is descended from Enos, who is the son of Seth, who is the son of Adam—the son of God. So Jesus is not just the Son of David. He is the royal Son of God. He is God in the flesh. He is doubly royal. He is Messiah—the Son of David. And He is God in flesh—the Son of God. If Jesus is that kind of King, then there needs to be proper preparation because when royalty arrives, one must be ready. One must be prepared.

So I want to go through the rest of the text and want talk about three groups, or three parties, that will be preparing for Jesus' royal coming because in order to enjoy the King's reign, one must prepare for the King's arrival. If we're going to enjoy the King's reign—if we're going to benefit from it—we must be prepared for His arrival.

So let's look at three different groups preparing for Jesus' arrival:

1. John's Prophetic Preparation
2. Israel's Radical Preparation
3. Jesus' Glorious Preparation

1. John's Prophetic Preparation

We see John's prophetic preparation in Luke 3:1-6:

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ 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.
⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

Let me remind you of John's identity, the John who is talked about in these first verses of Luke 3. We've been told several impressive things already about him in Luke's Gospel. In Luke 1:15-16 we're told that this John:

- Will be "*great before the Lord*"
- Will be "*filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb*"
- Will have a powerful ministry to the children of Israel, calling them back to the true worship of their God in the spirit and the power of the great prophet Elijah

Most importantly, we are told that John's role or relationship will be to the Messiah, his distant cousin, Jesus. The angel Gabriel had told John's father, Zechariah, that he would go before the Messiah, in the spirit and power of Elijah, turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just—and then here it is, "*to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*" This was John's job, "*to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*"

Zechariah himself, John's own father, prophesied about this in Luke 1:76-77, when he said, "*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go*

before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.” Clearly in chapter three, something big is about to happen because Luke gives us the historical setting in great detail. This is again evidence of what Luke says about himself in the very first verses of this book, that he was the careful historian, that he set out to give a very orderly account of the life of Jesus.

The last time we see the historical setting laid out for us like this is at the beginning of chapter two when Jesus is about to be born—those famous words that we read at Christmas: “*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus.*” Well, now there’s a new Caesar in town. His name is Tiberius. Luke begins in a very organized way with the emperor—the top dog—and going down to the regional rulers, all these other guys listed. Some of these names you probably recognize and they’ll be important later on in the story of Jesus:

- Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor before whom Jesus will stand in trial.
- Herod. This is not the Herod who was alive when Jesus was born; he died shortly after Jesus’ birth. This is his son, Herod Antipas. He will play a role in the story as well.
- Caiaphas was officially the high priest, a regional, religious leader, but...
- Annas (father-in-law to Caiaphas) was the high-priest-emeritus, behind the scenes pulling a lot of the strings. Together, these two guys were sort of a two-headed monster.

To hear these names and know their history is to hear a background of greed, lust for power, abuse of authority and of oppression. It was a dark setting. And into this setting we hear what may be the most important words in this whole chapter, “*the word of God came to John.*” The word of God came! In a sense, God had been silent for over 400 years. The last time His people had heard His word through a prophetic voice had been the prophet Malachi almost 450 years earlier. And now, in just the same formula as we see in the books of Jeremiah, Isaiah and Hosea where it says, “and the word of the Lord came to...” and then the prophet’s name is right there, we hear, “*the word of God came to John.*” God had not abandoned His people. Light was dawning into this dark world.

John looked every bit the part of an Old Testament prophet. He was living in the wilderness, living off the land. He looked like someone who walked out of an episode of “Duck Dynasty.” I mean, he had camel-skin clothes, a leather belt, eating live locusts and wild honey. And preaching like the prophets:

- Social justice—how are you treating your neighbor?
- Preaching against oppression of the poor.
- Calling people to repentance.
- Preaching against the sins of the king, and as we'll read later on, paying for it with his life.

John himself—we read in this text—was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. It says in verse four, these were “*the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness.’*” That’s John. Isaiah had prophesied about him. He would be the preparer—the forerunner—for the Messiah; preparing the way for the Lord.

What does that preparation look like? It looks like a massive public works project. Flattening out the high spots. Filling in the low spots. Making straight roads and straight paths. It’s the picture of what would happen in ancient times if a king or great dignitary were coming to the town. People would go the extra mile to smooth out the road surface on which that dignitary or king would arrive. They would line the streets with great celebration, pomp and great circumstance.

For Isaiah’s first readers—the Jewish exiles in Babylon—they would have seen a partial fulfillment in this prophesy by their being able to return to Jerusalem, the Promised Land, by the decree of Cyrus the Persian. But the magnitude of this prophecy awaited a greater fulfillment. Note that it says, “*Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.*” The whole earth prepared for the arrival of God’s Messiah, the One Who would lead His captive people on a new exodus into a greater deliverance.

This deliverance is talked about in verse six, not just for one specific ethnic group but for “*all flesh.*” Luke is fond of talking about the universal nature of Jesus’ work, that it is for all kinds of people. Not that it’s applied to every last person but it is for all people groups. So this is for all flesh. What’s for all flesh? The salvation of our God. That’s what the Messiah has come to do. He’s come to deliver salvation.

If you go to your Old Testament, it’s interesting to see this verse in Isaiah. You would see that it doesn’t say all flesh will see the *salvation* of God. It says all flesh will see the *glory* of the Lord. The glory of the Lord; the salvation of God. What glorifies God the most? It is salvation of all flesh. It is the salvation of all peoples.

Read the book of Revelation. A multi-ethnic group before the throne of God—before the throne of Jesus Christ the Lamb—praising Him for all eternity. That’s what brings God the most glory. It’s salvation of all peoples.

John had this unique role of preparing the way. He had the unique ministry of preparation before the Messiah Who would bring this salvation; Who would secure it for His people. John’s role and ministry are symbolized in baptism. It’s why we know this guy as John the Baptist. Baptism—a ritual cleansing of a person in water that was intended to be a picture of an inner spiritual reality of repentance. The text says, *“baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”* For the washing away of sins. It became John’s hallmark.

2. Israel’s Radical Preparation

John the Baptist’s ministry of preparation here is targeted specifically to the nation of Israel. Look how they responded in Luke 3:7-14. We’ll look at Israel’s radical preparation.

[John] said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! [You snakes!] Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

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.”

John is a rock star. He’s famous. He’s the most popular guy in town. He is the main event. People are coming out to see the first prophet in over 400 years. He’s the most popular preacher in town and everybody wants to hear him. However, just look at his pastoral approach in verse seven. Apparently he missed that seminar on effective church. He calls his listeners vipers. “You bunch of snakes!” I know some of you who love snakes and maybe have pet snakes. But for the rest of us normal people, “snakes” is

not a compliment. It's like saying, "You're deceptive. You're wily. You're like a snake fleeing from the fire; fleeing from the wrath to come. You're looking for the nearest rock."

John understands that not all who are coming to him to be baptized are genuinely repentant. It's the first command he's giving—to repent—and he understands there are many who are not truly repentant. To repent means literally to turn. It means to do a 180-degree turn, to have a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of understanding. I was going this direction and now I've made a complete turn. I've had a complete change of mind and heart and am going in the opposite direction.

Change of mind and heart about what? Well, repentance is a change of heart regarding my sin and how I understand and look at my sin. It's a depth of sorrow that leads me not only to be sorry for my sin but also to change my actions. It means being sorry, truly sorry about my sin. But it means more than that. It means a resulting change in my behavior.

Everybody feels bad when they get caught, right? Everybody feels bad when they realize they've hurt somebody else. But being sorry for our sins is more than that. True repentance is not just being sorry that we hurt someone else. True repentance occurs when we realize we have offended a holy God. True repentance occurs when we realize we have failed our Creator Who loves us and our lives change because of that. When there's repentance, there's real fruit. The fruit of filling in the valleys of self-pity. The fruit of cutting down the mountains of pride. That's what true repentance looks like.

John didn't see true repentance in many of those who were coming out to be baptized so he warned them in the strongest terms: "You brood of vipers! You snakes! You're not children of Abraham—you're the offspring of snakes." Their stand was one of presuming on God's grace. These Israelites were assuming that because of their status as God's chosen nation—as children of Abraham—they could go through the motions and God would be obligated to forgive them.

It makes me think of Jonah and his response to the sailors. Remember in the story of Jonah how he was hiding below the deck? He was literally trying to run from God. Eventually the sailors haul him up on deck and find out that the storm is his fault. He's the reason that all this bad stuff is happening to them. They say, "Well, who are you?" And Jonah says, "I am a Hebrew and I fear God." Duck for the lightning bolt. "You fear God? You're running from God. Are you serious?"

John says, “Don’t talk to me about being children of Abraham. You’re like the offspring of snakes. If God is interested in producing the physical descendants of Abraham, He can turn these stones into children of Abraham.” What God wants is children of Abraham by faith, as Paul called them later on in Romans. Those who, like Abraham, look forward in faith to God’s Messiah, the offspring of Abraham.

What a sobering reminder to us that we ought never to presume upon God’s grace. We ought never to presume that God is obligated to forgive me because I attend a certain church or am a member of a certain church. Or that God owes me something or I’m right with God because of that. Or that because I have a certain family background, or because I believe certain things in a doctrinal statement or just because I believe the Bible is true.

We need to put our hope where the writer of the hymn put his hope,

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.

(My Hope is Built by Edward Mote, 1834)

I’m not going to trust anything else. I’m going to stake my entire life on the Lord Jesus Christ Who has fully paid for all my sin; Who has reconciled me to the Father; Who clothes me with His righteousness as I trust Him—my only hope in life and death.

John made it clear that the thing their repentance lacked was fruit. You hear it over and over again. Where’s the fruit? The axe is at the bottom of the tree and God is getting ready to swing it because there is no fruit (Luke 3:9).

What does fruit look like? Well, they ask and Jesus says, “It’s really simple. Do you have something and see somebody who doesn’t? Have compassion on them. Give. Be generous. Do you have a position of authority like the tax collectors and the soldiers here did? Then don’t abuse it. Do your work to God’s glory. Be content with what you have.”

I think it’s interesting that the tax collectors were certainly looked down on. These soldiers may have been their cohorts in protecting them, so they were probably looked down on as well. Yet, John doesn’t say, “Hey, you’ve repented and you want to follow the Messiah? Go quit your jobs. Go to a monastery. Become a pastor.” No. He says, “Continue in your job. Do what God has called you to do, but do it to His glory. Don’t abuse your position.” This is where we get the idea of Christian vocation—Christian calling—where we can glorify God in whatever we’re called to do.

Israel's preparation for the Messiah King was to be radical repentance, yet most failed at that and did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and turn to Him, as we'll see throughout the book of Luke.

In fact, we see here in verses 15-20 that many thought maybe John was the Messiah. Look at verses 15 through 20:

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 with 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 reprovved 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.

John had a powerful, powerful ministry. He had a lot of what people were looking for in a Messiah. Jesus Himself said about John, "There's not been anyone born of woman who is greater than John. He's the greatest man I know" (Luke 7:28). So with this spirit of expectation regarding the Messiah running high, you can see how people wondered if John might be the Messiah. "John, are you the Messiah?" they asked. John's answer is, "No. There's no comparison between me and the Messiah. The Messiah's ministry is going to be far superior to mine."

Then John lays out three ways in which Jesus' ministry is superior to his; in which Jesus Himself is superior to John.

First, Jesus is worthy of greater honor. In those days the disciple-rabbi relationship was that the student was basically the slave of the teacher or the rabbi. The student was expected to do whatever the rabbi wanted him to do—except one thing. There was one thing too low for the most menial slave or student to do—untie his teacher's sandals. John says, "I'm not even worthy to do that for Jesus. He is that much greater than I am. He's that much more superior. He's that much more worthy of honor."

Secondly, Jesus has a greater baptism. John says, the Messiah—Jesus—performs a holier baptism. "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:16). Notice that John says, "He will baptize you" to people John has already baptized. In other words,

John's baptism is not the end of the story. It's only temporary and provisional. It's not final. His was a baptism of preparation for the coming Messiah. It's why we read in the book of Acts about Paul meeting some disciples of John in the town of Ephesus but they had never heard of Jesus' baptism. They needed to be baptized again in Jesus' name and receive the Holy Spirit. They had not heard of the Holy Spirit.

John is calling those he preaches to to repent. Jesus will call them to repent and believe in Him—as their Messiah, as their Savior, as their Lord. And if they do, they will be baptized in and with the Holy Spirit. God's promise for everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation is when they believe, they are baptized in the Holy Spirit. That is, their guilty stains of sin are cleaned away and the very Spirit of God comes to live and dwell within them.

One commentator put it this way:

“John could put repentant people in water. In a sense anyone could. Only One Who was God could put the Holy Spirit in people.”

That was Jesus Who had the superior baptism. However, for those who do not turn to Jesus in repentance and faith, His baptism is one of fire—the text says “*unquenchable fire*.” Here we have a picture of hell—eternal separation from God for those who do not turn from their sins, repent and trust in Jesus as the Messiah.

As we read the Gospels we understand that Jesus talked about and preached about hell more than anyone else. John gives us a picture of it here but it's very connected to Jesus in verse 17. It says, “*His [the Messiah's] 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.*”

It's a picture of how they would harvest the grain and then winnow it by taking a shovelful of wheat and throwing it up in the air. The heavy, weighty part—the fruit, the solid part—would fall back down but the chaff would blow away. And when they had winnowed it they would gather all of the good grain together and put it in the barn for storage. The chaff would be gathered and burned.

What a picture of the great separation at the end of time. When Jesus Christ returns, there will be a great dividing line between those who are weighty because they are trusting in His blood and righteousness and have received Him by faith, and those who refuse to do that and will be taken to the place where there is unquenchable fire,

where the Bible says there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 13:28), where the flames do not end (Jude 1:7).

Third, Jesus has the authority to hold men and women accountable. This is the third way Jesus and His ministry are superior to John. The winnowing fork is in His hand and He has the authority to hold men and women accountable. Luke tells us this is good news. Do you see that in verse 18? “*With many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.*” It is good news. It is great news to tell a person how they can escape the unquenchable fires of hell.

But for those who only sense that their self-absorbed, sinful ways are being threatened, the news must be censored. And that is what Herod did. That was his response. John had not been afraid—he was courageous to preach the truth. And he had preached against the immorality of Herod who had divorced his wife, caused his sister-in-law Herodias to divorce her husband (his half-brother Philip), and then the two of them got married. But that was only the tip of the iceberg. Luke tells us in verse 19 that in addition to his abandonment of his wedding vows and his adulterous relationship with Herodias, Herod was guilty of many other evils—“*all the other evil things*” verse 19 says.

John preached against Herod and called him to account and for such boldness John paid dearly. It says Herod locked him up in prison. The King James Version says, “He shut him up.” He locked him up in order to shut him up. Herod didn’t want to hear it. He didn’t want to be called to account by God.

At this point in the story John the Baptist is pretty much closed out of the story. We don’t hear of or from him hardly at all after this point. In chapter seven we read about him sending envoys to Jesus to ask Him about being the Messiah. Later on in chapter nine we see how Herod eventually did execute John. But that’s it. We don’t read about John the Baptist anymore. He fades into the background as Luke continues to tell the story of Jesus—just what he said he would do. John said, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” (John 3:30).

3. Jesus’ Glorious Preparation

There’s a third person in this story Who needs to prepare and that’s Jesus. Maybe that surprises you. Verses 21-23 tell us of Jesus’ glorious preparation.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph...

Jesus of Nazareth was assumed to be the son of Joseph. Joseph, in a sense, was His father—His adopted human father. Here He is, about to begin His mission as the Messiah, but there's one final step of preparation left for Jesus. It's probably not what we would have expected, given the glorious reputation that had preceded Him.

Jesus is baptized by John. But what a God-glorifying event this is. In Jesus' baptism we see all three Persons of the Trinity gloriously on display.

Jesus is there as the Son of God, in the flesh; His real body being baptized with real water. And He's praying to God His Father. What is He praying? What is He asking for? Maybe He's asking for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Maybe He's asking for His Father's blessing because that is exactly what He gets. He receives the Holy Spirit and He receives His Father's blessing.

Then there's the Holy Spirit, descending in the form of a dove, sent by the Father to empower the Son. We're not exactly sure what the symbolism of the dove means. More importantly it is the manner or the way a dove descends: gently, gracefully, pointing to the manner or the way of Jesus' ministry. He was gentle. He was graceful. He was the Comforter. We read that He was the Consolation of Israel, empowered by the Holy Spirit Whom He said is the great Comforter—the Great Paraclete. So Jesus is receiving the comfort of the Holy Spirit to begin His ministry.

Then there's the Father declaring audibly for all present to hear that Jesus is His one and only, best-loved Son, the One Who brings Him pleasure, the One in Whom He is pleased. And there's the Father sending the Holy Spirit to empower the Son, the Messiah, to carry out His mission to seek and save the lost, and to glorify the Father by bringing salvation to all flesh, all peoples, without distinction.

At His baptism, Jesus is being anointed as the King, as God's Messiah. It's His inauguration—the inauguration of His administration as the Savior of all peoples. And the Holy Spirit would be His empowerment for carrying out that mission. Not that Jesus lacked the Holy Spirit. We know that if John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his conception and birth, surely Jesus was as well. But the Holy Spirit's visible presence at

Jesus' baptism was the Father's way of encouraging His Son, putting His stamp of approval—His blessing—on His Son's ministry as His anointed.

We can only imagine what that was like. It must have been spectacular! But why baptism? I mean, God could have put His stamp of approval on Jesus in the temple square. Maybe a laser light show from the top of Mt. Zion or something like that. Everybody would see it.

But why baptism? Why did Jesus go to be baptized in the Jordan River? I mean, baptism is for people who need to repent. Jesus is the sinless Son of God. He didn't need to repent. He never had any reason for regret. He was the sinless Son of Adam, the Second Adam.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 5:18-21—his comparison about the first Adam and Jesus the Second Adam.

Therefore, as one trespass [by the first Adam] led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness [by the Jesus, the Second Adam] leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus—the only sinless son of Adam, Himself the Second Adam—was baptized as a Representative for the sinful sons and daughters of the first Adam. We read in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus came to John and John didn't initially want to baptize Him (John 3:14). But Jesus said it was necessary to “*fulfill all righteousness*” (John 3:15). In order for unrighteous people like us to be counted righteous, to be able to experience a restored relationship with our loving Creator, Jesus needed to represent us. So He first represented us at His baptism, identifying fully with sinful people like you and me.

Then He identified with us again at the cross where, in the place of sinful men and women, He received the full wrath of God—the just penalty for sin—in order that everyone who trusts in Him might know what it means to have their sins forgiven. Everything that baptism represents—the washing away of our sins and having our consciences cleansed—was secured because Jesus was our representative.

So as we come to this table today, we remember that Jesus stood in our place. We remember that Jesus went to the cross in our place. So as we take communion, there's one more person here who needs to be prepared. That's you. That's me. The Apostle

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11 that when we come to the table of the Lord, we come together as God's people and have communion.

As we take the bread and the cup, we need to discern the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we need to examine ourselves so we do not eat and drink without discerning Jesus' body and blood and do it in an unworthy manner. I want us to spend a couple moments examining ourselves and asking two questions. Answer these in the quietness of your own heart.

The first question is are you coming to the communion table out of habit? Or out of a superstition of some sort? Before the Lord, ask yourself, "Am I taking communion because I always do? Because the person next to me is going to do it? Because it's the second Sunday of the month when we always have communion so I'm just going to go through the whole process again? Am I doing this because I think God will like me better if I do it than if I don't do it?"

You need to discern the body and blood of Jesus.

The second question is what is the only source of my hope in life and death? What am I relying on? When we come to the table of the Lord, remember that our hope is in nothing less than Jesus Christ, in His blood and righteousness. We don't come to the table because we are worthy. We come to the table because Jesus is worthy. We don't come because we've got it together; because we're perfect and without sin. Not at all. We come depending on God's grace and His finished work on the cross.

If you feel unworthy, you are invited to come to Jesus as your Messiah. Come to Him in faith, trusting Him for your salvation. Believe that Jesus' blood has paid your ransom and that the body of Jesus was broken so your relationship to your Creator could be restored forever.

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You went to the old rugged cross and bore all the scorn and shame we deserve. We worship You for that. God, we praise You for raising Jesus Christ to new life so we might be transformed by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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