

Members Notes #21

Luke 3:1-14 You sons of snakes!

John gets mean

TONIGHT'S PURPOSE: In this representative sample of his preaching, Luke shows how John the Baptist answers the twin questions; What does real righteousness look like and what are the "products (fruit)" of repentance? Surprisingly, the answer can be boiled down to two words - **Contentment** and **Trust**.

"Eight Palestinian Viper Snakes in Nazareth home," blares the headline from *IsraelWire* for August 6, 1999. It turns out that a Nazareth family, after spreading insecticide around their home had to call the snake catcher after seeing numerous snakes coming out of nooks and crannies. The snake catcher caught eight venomous Palestinian Vipers before he left. The common Palestinian Viper lays up to 20 eggs which hatch in six weeks as eight inch long vipers. Now scroll back in Palestine nearly 2,000 years and we hear John the Baptist railing at his audience as a "brood (offspring) of vipers." Later in his ministry Jesus uses the same expression to describe the Pharisees. John is not at all soft-spoken as he addresses the crowd. His warnings are sharp, even severe. Those who come out to hear him are compared to snakes that slither out of their holes and *flee* across the desert as a fire approaches. God's enemies are often called snakes (Is 14:29; 59:5; Jer 46:22). Who wants to be near a snake? John calls the people snakes to warn them that their heart is not right and that his words must be heeded. No casual response will do; eternal realities are at stake. The snakes need transformation, since the fire of God's wrath draws near. He demands the evidence or fruit of repentance, not merely the religious status quo. Decades later, Jesus' brother James put it another way, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:17, 26).

After John's fiery preaching (remember he's preaching to believers) three different groups ask, "*What should we do then?*" John's answers are stated directly and concretely. Those who are truly getting right with God are committed to sensitivity and responsiveness to others' needs, fairness to those they deal with and willingness to accept a "no-frills" standard of living.

I Sensitivity and responsiveness to other people's needs

The people should be ready to share their clothes, if they have more than they need: if someone is without clothes, clothe him. The *tunics* were actually undershirts (underwear) that were worn beneath the first-century outer garments [Bauer 1979:882, visx1m].

"He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

The first requirement John gives is for compassion and mercy on those less fortunate than ourselves: neighbour in our modern day globalization context would include the _____ of other lands and nations.

Q1 Does sharing clothing and food with the poor constitute meaningful repentance? [Remember, non-Christians can also be very good in charitable acts.] How are you applying this in your everyday life?

II A Commitment to fairness to those I deal with

Tax collectors were hated for two reasons. First, they worked for the oppressor, the enemy - the Romans. They were viewed as traitors, turncoats, who would sell out their honour for the love of money. Second, they had a reputation for cheating their fellow citizens wherever they

Members Notes #21

could. Tax collectors worked on a "farm system". A chief tax collector would bid on a contract to collect taxes from an entire district. He was responsible for collecting a certain amount. Whatever he could collect over that amount he could keep for himself. In turn, he hired others to work for him on a similar basis. Tax collectors had a strong economic incentive to collect as much as _____. We tell lawyer jokes; they probably had developed a whole repertoire of jokes to jab at the tax collectors.

Q2 Tax collectors were tempted to collect more than was due to them. How does this same temptation show up in your line of work or education or home?

III A willingness to accept a "no-frills" standard of living

In ancient times a soldier was paid only enough to maintain a _____ (Caragounis 1974:35-57). These were probably not Roman soldiers but Jewish lads of Herod Antipas' force. The chief problem, John the Baptist says, is the soldiers' discontent with what they have.

"But godliness with contentment is great gain... Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:11-13).

Q3 We joke alot about the 10th commandment, "Thou shall not covet" but how much is coveting a part of our lifestyle?

SUMMARY

When you think about it, John's whole message here is about **contentment and trust**. Each of John's practical examples of fruits of repentance revolves around the love of money or of material things. To share clothing and food with those less fortunate requires that we repent of _____. For a tax collector to repent of over-collection of taxes deals with the sins of _____. For a soldier to cease from extorting money by violence or blackmail, too, requires repentance from _____. Greed is the adversary of contentment in our soul. But greed stems not from a lack of money, but from a **lack of trust**. To be contented means to trust God for our daily needs, which is faith in action, while greed drives us to grasp and heap up money and material things. Repentance demands dethroning discontentment and distrust, which fuel materialism. The people responded to John's preaching with contrite hearts: "What should we do, then?" Our response as disciples should be a simple prayer to God, "What, Lord are you trying to say to me? And what should I be doing?"

WORKS TIME

Remember to pull out your *Book of Life*. Why not ask some of your people to do share about the acts of kindness they have been undertaken for their Oikos.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Don't forget to signup for church Camp 2011 "A Fresh Encounter" at the Welcome Desk this Sunday.