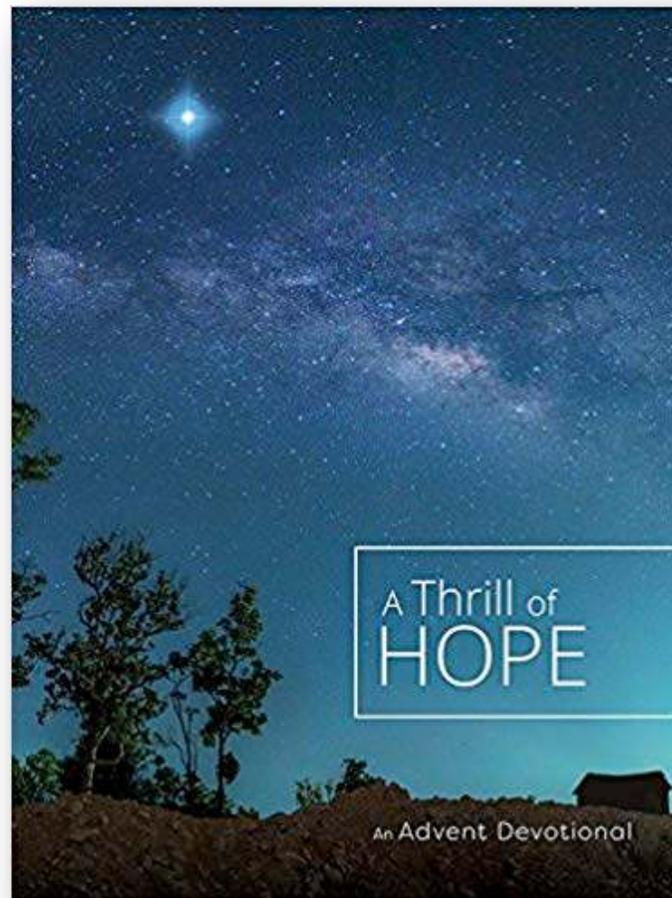


# A Thrill of Hope

Advent, 2018, Nashville First Church of the Nazarene

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*We invite you to follow the day-by-day devotional guide.  
These lessons are based on the Sunday readings of the Advent Season.*

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## Introduction to the series:

This Christmas we find ourselves in a Nation at odds (some would say 'war') with itself. Social issues, political battles, shifting norms, as well as real and imagined dangers assault us on every news channel and in social media until many just hunker down, not wanting to say anything for fear of the fray. The realities are genuine. The larger reality is God's sovereignty and our Lord's return.

We can take the stance of Chicken Little: "**THE SKY IS FALLING; THE SKY IS FALLING**". Anticipating catastrophe is neither attractive nor helpful. Yet, it is common. We all feel tempted to cave in to the fear and anger of the times. (<https://americanliterature.com/childrens-stories/henny-penny-the-sky-is-falling>)

### *There is another choice.*

We can embrace our Lord's challenge, "**WHEN ALL THESE THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN, STAND AND LOOK UP, FOR YOUR SALVATION IS NEAR!**" (Luke 21:28).

Advent is a time to readjust our perspective. When the world is out of sorts, God is on the move. This psalm speaks of an advent (arrival) of God's perspective.

*God is our refuge and strength,  
always ready to help in times of  
trouble.*  
<sup>2</sup> *So we will not fear when earthquakes  
come  
and the mountains crumble into the  
sea.*  
<sup>3</sup> *Let the oceans roar and foam.  
Let the mountains tremble as the  
waters surge! Interlude*  
<sup>4</sup> *A river brings joy to the city of our  
God,  
the sacred home of the Most High.*  
<sup>5</sup> *God dwells in that city; it cannot be  
destroyed.  
From the very break of day, God will  
protect it.*  
<sup>6</sup> *The nations are in chaos,  
and their kingdoms crumble!  
God's voice thunders,  
and the earth melts!*

<sup>7</sup> *The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here  
among us;  
the God of Israel<sup>[b]</sup> is our fortress.*  
*Interlude*  
<sup>8</sup> *Come, see the glorious works of the  
Lord:  
See how he brings destruction upon  
the world.*  
<sup>9</sup> *He causes wars to end throughout the  
earth.  
He breaks the bow and snaps the  
spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.*  
<sup>10</sup> *"Be still, and know that I am God!  
I will be honored by every nation.  
I will be honored throughout the  
world."*  
<sup>11</sup> *The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here  
among us;  
the God of Israel is our fortress.*  
*(Psalm 46, NLT)*

Dr. Parrott, Thanksgiving Day, 2018

December 2, 2018

## The Anticipation of Hope Luke 21:25-36

The Advent season reverberates with songs of hope. Hope is central in the old hymn by Charles Wesley, "Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus." Written in 1744, it reads,

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation, **hope of all the earth** Thou art;  
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
by Thine own sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

I'll make an observation: **One does not bring hope to self-satisfied people; one brings hope to desperate people.** Jesus came to fulfill the hope of Israel as the Messiah King who accomplishes God's intention for the Nation. Isaiah pictures hope in the birth of God's Messiah/King who would turn darkness into light by lifting the government of the Kingdom on his shoulders (Isaiah 9:1, 6-7).

*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.  
+++++*  
*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.*

## **THE GATHERING STORM**

### **The Historical Background for the Text**

Jesus was born at time when Israel was moving toward revolt against Rome. At the moment of his birth, a gathering storm of conflict and warfare was forming. The storm had three elements (I'm indebted to NT Wright, *Simply Jesus*, 2011.)

- **The first element of the gathering storm** was the new social, political and (not least) military reality of the day, **THE ROMAN EMPIRE**. Rome had been steadily increasing in power and prominence over the previous centuries. Until thirty years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, Rome had been a republic. But with Julius Caesar all that changed. His ambition, and then his assassination, threw Rome into a long, bloody civil war, from which Caesar's adopted son, Augustus, emerged as the winner. He sent governors to the Middle East. The job of a Roman governor was to administer justice, collect the taxes, and keep the peace - and particularly to suppress unrest.

**QUESTION:** The Romans were known for bringing peace *Pax Romana* (The term "***Pax Romana***," literally means "Roman peace" and refers to the time period from 27 BC to 180 AD in the Roman Empire.) Contrast how nations "keep the peace and how God "gives us peace."

- **The second element of the gathering storm**, the overheated high-pressure system, is **THE STORY OF ISRAEL** as Jesus' contemporaries perceived it and believed themselves to be living in it. As far back as we can trace their ancient scriptures; the Jewish people had believed that their story was going somewhere, that it had an appointed goal. Despite many setbacks and disappointments, their God would make sure they reached the goal at last.

**QUESTION:** A biblical worldview presupposes a "*telos*," an ultimate end or purpose. At the time of Jesus, what did the Jews envision as God's "*telos*" – ultimate end? What do you believe is God's ultimate end – his "*telos*"?

- **The third element of the gathering storm** was the unpredictable element: **GOD HIMSELF**. God is free and sovereign. Again and again, in the past, Israel had expectations for God's actions. Nonetheless, God's actions were often different from Israel's expectation. Jesus believed it was happening again.

**QUESTION:** How do you respond to the thought, "the unpredictable element: **GOD HIMSELF**"? How has God moved in unpredictable ways through Jesus? How has God surprised you with his direction for your life?

In our quiet, peaceful, and gentle telling of the Christmas story, the storm is hard to envision. The tempest is tucked behind kindly shepherds, glorious angels, and a mother and child. Yet, the storm was there from the beginning. King Herod

assaulted the children. Satan tempted Jesus. The storm reached its height on the cross on Calvary. However, the storm had one more blow to deliver – ***the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD***, a moment that, for the first generation of Christians, 1) validated the victory of King Jesus and 2) affirmed the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth.

**QUESTION:** Are we experiencing a “gathering storm” in our Nation? How might the “gathering storm” validate Jesus’ victory and affirm God’s Kingdom?

**Part 1**  
**CHRISTIANS OBEY JESUS AND FLEE THE CITY OF JERUSALEM**  
**70AD**

A profound historical event, the fall of the old city of Jerusalem, represents the climax of the separation between Jewish and Christian ways. The old ways, associated with the old city, would be lost as the Servant People carried the message of Christ and his Kingdom to the wide world.

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Palestine continued their strict adherence to Jewish orthodoxy, adding Jesus to the Law of Moses. Yet, despite their loyalty to the Law and Messiah, the persecution of Jewish Christians continued.

- James, the son of Zebedee, was murdered by order of Herod Agrippa in 41 C.E. (Acts 12:2).
- James' brother John, "*the beloved disciple*," (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) fled Jerusalem.
- Peter was arrested, but escaped (Acts 12:1-19) to carry out missionary travels of his own. He, like Paul, came to Rome and died under the persecution of Nero.
- The last Christian leader in Jerusalem was James (Acts 21:18), the brother of Jesus Christ. He was murdered in 62 C.E. by command of the Jewish High Priest. His death left the church in Jerusalem without a leader.

**QUESTION:** Imagine you are one of the faithful Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. As a young person, you saw, heard, and fell in love with Jesus. You witnessed miracles, the crucifixion, and viewed with your own eyes his glorious risen body. Nonetheless, that was almost 40 years ago. What questions might be in your mind and heart? How do you remain faithful? How do you overcome discouragement?

**QUESTION:** Make it personal: How do YOU overcome discouragement?

The tension between Roman officials and Temple authorities increased. The construction of Herod’s Temple began before the birth of Christ and was completed in 64 AD. After almost 70 years of work, the completion of the project left many

thousands of laborers whose father's and grandfather's had worked on the Temple where now out of work. People were hungry, desperate and enraged. The "gathering storm" broke into full fury in 66 AD with the Great Jewish Revolt. (See <https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Jewish-Revolt> for a synopsis of the revolt. For a more details history, see <https://www.ancient.eu/article/823/the-great-jewish-revolt-of-66-ce/>)

The bloody war that followed was filled with tragedy, cruelty, and heroic moments. Nonetheless, in the end, the Romans overwhelmed Jerusalem, tearing down the Temple that had been completed six years earlier. They carried off the sacred articles of worship and took them to Rome. Jerusalem was destroyed. Every synagogue in Palestine was burned to the ground.

**QUESTION:** When tragedy strikes, our perspective harbors our faith or our doubt. How might the Jewish people have understood the disaster? What were their feelings, thoughts, and view of the future? Did the Jewish Christians have a different perspective? Why?

**QUESTION:** Make it personal. How does faith change our perspective on disaster?

Hundreds of years earlier, Jeremiah saw the coming hordes from the north ready to destroy Jerusalem. He warned the people to flee the city. He was charged with treason. ***Jesus warned his followers to flee from the city to the hills when they saw that the Romans were about to lay siege to the city.*** They did. They were considered traitors. That moment marked the end of all ties with the Jewish past. Christians were barred from attending synagogues. Jewish authorities made it clear that any Jew who wished to remain faithful to his religion could not be a Christian.

**QUESTION:** The Jewish Christians obeyed Jesus and were vilified for it. Have you ever had that experience? How did you handle it?

## **Part 2**

### **JESUS PREDICTS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE**

#### **circa 30AD**

Jesus' prophesy of the Temple's end is our text for today – **Luke 21:25-36**. The key to unlocking the text is found in the phrase, "*this generation.*"

*"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Luke 21:32-33).*

You can interpret the phrase, "this generation," to mean "an unknown length of time." This would focus the prophecy in our text strictly on to the return of Christ. The more natural way to understand the phrase, "this generation," and certainly the

way the people who heard Jesus understood it, was a generation of forty years. Forty years was the length of time between Jesus' words and the city's fall.

The passage is primarily for the people who would face the horrible destruction of their city in 70 AD – *"this generation."* However, we can posit a larger context that points to the destruction of the old heaven and earth – *"will pass away"* – with the confidence that Christ's *"words will never pass away."* God will bring about the complete salvation of creation with the New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21:1-4).

**QUESTION:** What is your understanding of *"this generation"*? Can a prophecy have a near fulfillment (Jerusalem's fall in 40 years) and a long-range fulfillment, (the Return of Jesus Christ)? If the prophecy means both – the fall the Jerusalem and the Return of Christ – how do we read and understand this prophecy?

For the people listening to Jesus' voice, he provides clear instruction on what to do and what to think when you see the Romans circling the city of Jerusalem. We can learn from these words how we are to think about the terrors of our world, and how we are to remain faithful to the end. Let me divide the prophecy into four commands.

### **1. When the Romans surround the Jerusalem, leave the city (vv.20-24).**

*"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. <sup>22</sup> For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. <sup>23</sup> How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. <sup>24</sup> They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20-24)*

Jesus predicts that the armies of Rome will surround Jerusalem. At that time, *"flee to the mountains . . . get out"* . . . and don't *"enter the city"*! This moment is the beginning of punishment on the Temple and Jerusalem for rejecting Jesus. The description of the assault on the city will be *"dreadful,"* especially for *"pregnant women and nursing mothers!"* The Romans will deliver *"distress in the land and wrath against this people"* by prison and death. In the Jewish mind at that time, four empires have ruled, Rome being the last. The end of the times of the Gentiles means that the Kingdom of God has been established on earth (Luke 4:43).

**QUESTION:** In what sense was the Kingdom of God *announced* on earth during the ministry of Jesus? How was the Kingdom of God *established* on earth through the crucifixion, resurrection and Pentecost? In what sense was

the Kingdom *validated* at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem? In what sense are we still waiting for the Kingdom of God to be completed on earth?

**QUESTION:** Make it personal. We live "in-between" the times – the establishment and completion of God's Kingdom. What instructions would you give to someone who lives "in between" the times?

## **2. When you see Jerusalem's destruction, take heart, redemption is here; the Son of Man is King of the World (vv.25-28).**

*"There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:25-28).*

***The Fall of Jerusalem.*** We can read these verses literally and focus on the sun, moon, and stars. Another option is to enter the mindset of the people who listened to Jesus on the day of his prophecy. They expected "*signs in the sun, moon, and stars*" at the time God's Kingdom is established. Nations will be shaken. Emperors will fall. Consider:

The Revolt began in 66 AD. Vespasian was sent by Nero to quell the rebels. Nero committed suicide the following year unleashing a civil war. The year 68-69 AD is known as "the year of four Emperors." Finally, Vespasian is proclaimed Emperor of Rome. He leaves the siege of Jerusalem in the hand of his son and returns to royal city. Perhaps the unrest in the highest levels of politics and power might be understood as "*signs in the sun, moon, and stars.*"

In his prophecy, Jesus turns to his favorite title for God's Messiah-King – "*the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory*" (vs. 27, see Daniel 7:13). He is stating that the fall of Jerusalem will validate that Jesus has established the Kingdom and is now the King of Heaven and Earth. The infighting of human empires means only advances the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the King.

***The Return of Jesus.*** Once we see these verses through the mind of Jesus and the people of his day, we can understand the fall of Jerusalem as an event that points toward the return of Jesus and the completion of the New Heaven and Earth. The book of Revelation lays out the plan: Evil will be defeated (Revelation 17-18); Jesus will return (Revelation 19); and Judgment will be executed (Revelation 20). At long last, The New Heaven will come down and God will be our God and we will be his people (Rev. 21). At that time, Christ will take the authority of heaven and earth he received from the "*Ancient of Days*" (Daniel 7) and place it into the hands of God.

*"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).*

Having prophesied all this, Jesus gives a final strong word for both the generation that saw Jerusalem fall and the generation that waits for the second coming of Christ.

*"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).*

In the face of world-altering events, Jesus commands us to *"stand up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near"* (vs. 28). We do not recognize disaster like the rest of the world understands it. We have a heavenly perspective on catastrophe. We see tragedy as a sign of redemption rather than deterioration.

**QUESTION:** How do you keep your head and heart clearly focused on God's purpose when the world (or your world) seems to be falling apart?

### **3. Interpret the tragedy of Jerusalem's fall as a validation of God's Kingdom (vv.29-31).**

*He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. <sup>31</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near (Luke 21:29-31).*

Unlike most Judean trees, fig trees lost their leaves each year; they produced new leaves when summer was coming, before the wheat harvest and well before the grape vintage. Once the signs were fulfilled, no further predicted barriers would remain to the coming of the kingdom.

For the people who heard Jesus predict the fall of Jerusalem, these verses transformed their perspective on the fall of Jerusalem. 1) The destruction of Temple validates the authority of the Son of Man, seated on the throne of Heaven. 2) The destruction of Jerusalem affirms the Kingdom of God has been set loose in the world.

**QUESTION:** As a Jewish Christian, how and why does the destruction of the Temple validate the authority of Jesus and affirm the Kingdom of God?

**QUESTION:** Make it personal. As a Christian, how can we help one another see "redemption" in destruction and disaster? How can national crisis, wars and rumors of wars, and signs in the heavens help us experience the Kingship of Jesus and the reality of the Kingdom of God on earth?

#### 4. Avoid the Trap; Learn to Escape; Stand Before The Son of Man (vv.34-36).

*“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).*

These final verses provide instructions for the first generation and our generation:

- ***Avoid the trap; be careful and courageous.*** Discouragement makes us more susceptible to “*carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life.*” These are traps for the heart. Be careful.

**QUESTION:** What trap is Jesus talking about and how do we avoid it?

- ***Learn to escape; always watch and pray.*** Jerusalem’s destruction has implications “*for all those who live on the face of the whole earth.*” The return of Jesus will be viewed by the whole earth. As the time for Jerusalem’s destruction grew closer, the Christians experienced greater pressure. So it is for us as we wait for his return. You withstand the pressure in prayer.

**QUESTION:** What is the escape Jesus is talking about; how do we escape?

- ***Stand before the Son of Man.*** This is our hope. We will see the one who saves and he will receive us. We will stand! Yes, stand before him.

**TEACHERS:** The film and song, “I Can Only Imagine” is a great illustration. Here is Berry Millard, composer and lyricist, description of writing this hit.

The lyrics to the song are based around the narrator wondering what it will be like in Heaven and to be standing before God. Berry had lost his father and many questions came to his heart. He explained to Fox News that “I was always told that if he [my father] could choose, he would rather be in Heaven than here with me. As a Christian, I believed that, but as an 18-year-old it was a little hard to swallow. So the questions in the song came from me asking God what was so great about Him that my dad would rather be there.” (Adams, Ramsay (6 July 2003). “Christian Rock Crosses Over”. Fox News (News Corporation). Archived from the original on 31 October 2011)

December 9, 2018

## The Way of Hope

### Luke 3:1-6

The text opens with names, titles, and places that are difficult to pronounce and confusing to read. Here are the text and the particulars for the dates and names.

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—<sup>2</sup> during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-2)*

- **Fifteenth year.** When Greek historians knew what year events happened, they often dated the events according to a ruler's years in office (Tiberius reigned from AD 14 until 37, but there is some overlap with his predecessor Augustus; scholars often date the time specified in this verse to between Sept. of AD 27 and Oct. of AD 28).
- **Pontius Pilate.** Judea's prefect (Administrator representing Rome) from AD 26 to 36; although well demonstrated in Jewish sources including an inscription, Pilate's only notoriety in the works of any existing Roman historians was a single mention in connection with his execution of Jesus.
- **Herod.** Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and a Samaritan wife, remained tetrarch (governor of a territory) of Galilee from 4 BC until AD 39 when he unwisely petitioned for greater authority.
- **Philip.** He was the Tetrarch (governor) of Traconitis, known as the "Rough Region" and still known to the Arabs as "the Refuge." He was a son of Herod the Great.
- **Annas and Caiaphas.** Annas was the high priest from AD 6 to 15 when the Roman governor Gratus deposed him. Nevertheless, Annas retained both title and influence, and five of the succeeding high priests were his sons. Gratus soon elevated Joseph Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas, to this role (AD 18 – 36).

If this is all we learn from these verses, it is not too helpful, save in the sense of preserving history, which was a priority for Luke (Luke 1:1-4). But there is more, so much more. Luke is asking us to relive a moment in history that was ripe with conflict and ready for revolt.

In a genuine and existential way, our current personal angst and political conflict in the United States echoes the raw emotions, seething tension, outbreaks of violence, and the awareness that "something has got to give." **First**, we will look at the events

of our moment in history. *Then*, we will look at the moment surrounding the ministry of John the Baptist. The parallel is **NOT** in precise events, but in the echo of anger and anxiety – “something has got to give.” Let’s look at the United States in the last few years.

### **THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN’ Anger and Angst**

On October 13, 2016, a tweet made ripples across the world of literature:

BREAKING 2016 **#NobelPrize** in Literature to Bob Dylan “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition”  
20.1K 5:00 AM - Oct 13, 2016 · Stockholm, Sweden

Here is one verse from the lyric that won the Nobel Prize.

Come writers and critics  
Who prophesize with your pen  
And keep your eyes wide  
The chance won’t come again  
And don’t speak too soon  
For the wheel’s still in spin  
And there’s no tellin’ who that it’s namin’  
For the loser now will be later to win  
For the times they are a-changin’

#### **1**

#### **Anger and Angst in the United States**

Dillon’s song rang out in the midst of the turbulent 60s. Yet, recognition for the lyric arrived in 2016. The reason: by the year 2016, our nation was in the midst of growing anger and anxiety as we experienced a large number of diverse political and social issues beating against the nation as waves against the shore. (The list below is found in Lukianoff and Haidt, *“The Coddling of the American Mind, How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting up a Generation for Failure*, 2018.)

(TEACHERS: Use this material as appropriate. Some classes will **NOT** tolerate any political observations or discussions. Others **WANT** to see connections between Bible days and today. Beware of getting trapped in a political/social debate. **THE POINT**: Today’s anger and anxiety is a shared with the time of John the Baptist.)

- **2014** Police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri; police killing of Eric Garner in New York City; Black lives matter protests spread across America; lead (Pb) in the drinking water in Flint Michigan

- **2015** Supreme Court legalizes gay marriage; Kaitlyn Jenner publicly identifies as a woman; White supremacist Dylann Roof massacres nine black worshippers in Charleston Carolina; Confederate flags removed from the state capital in South Carolina, police killing of Walter Scott; universities interrupt in protest over racism.
- **2016** terrorist Omar Mateen kills 49 in attack on gay nightclub in Orlando Florida; police killing of Alton Sterling (video); police killing of Philando Castillo (video); killing of five police officers in Dallas; quarterback Colin Kaepernick refuses to stand for national anthem; North Carolina requires transgender people to use the bathroom corresponding to the gender on their birth certificate; protest against Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock Indian Reservation; nomination and election of Donald Trump
- **2017** Trump Inauguration; Trump attempts to enact bans on several countries that are predominantly Muslim; women's march in Washington; violent protests against campus speakers at UC Berkeley and Middlebury; Trump bans transgender people from military service; Trump praises "very fine people on both sides" in Charlottesville March, during which a neo-Nazi kills Heather Heyer and injures others by driving the car into a crowd; 58 killed the largest mass shooting in US history in Las Vegas; start of the #metoo movement to expose and stop sexual harassment and assault.
- **2018** Nicholas Cruz, expelled student with a history of emotional and behavioral disorders, kills 17 at high school in Parkville Florida; students organize school walkouts and marches for gun control across the United States; the confirmation of Judge Kavanaugh, The mid-term elections, the Central American caravan arriving at the US border; US Troops on the border; 9<sup>th</sup> circuit Judges stops Trumps plan to require asylum seekers enter through a recognized port of entry.

Simply reading this non-partisan, factual list of these events evokes emotions such as worry and anger angst in most people, dread and rage in others. The tension is rising. Many sense that this cannot go on indefinitely. I find the following observation from a renowned political scientist and historian to be insightful.

Political scientists sometimes distinguish between normal politics and regime politics. Normal politics takes place within a political and constitutional order and concerns means, not ends. In other words, the ends or principles are agreed upon; the debate is simply over means. By contrast, regime politics is about who rules and for what ends or principles. It questions the nature of the political system itself. Who has rights? Who gets to vote? What do we honor or revere together as a people? I fear America may be leaving the world of normal politics and entering the dangerous world of regime politics—a politics in which our political loyalties diverge more and more, as

they did in the 1850s, between two contrary visions of the country  
(**Charles R. Kesler**, Editor, *Claremont Review of Books*,  
<https://www.cmc.edu/academic/faculty/profile/charles-kesler>)

The 1850s was a decade of political conflict and rage that led us into the Civil War in our Nation's history, 157 years ago. I have heard whispers from some who fear we may be headed that way again.

**QUESTION:** Teachers, you might want to ask your class members to register the intensity of their feelings about what is happening in the Nation: 1=very calm to 10=very concerned. Average the answers. (NOTICE: you are not asking for a position on issues, but intensity of concern.)

The point in this jarring illustration is to identify the fears, concerns, and uncertainty many people in the United States are experiencing today. NOW, I want to take a leap back in time.

## 2

### **Anger and Angst in New Testament Israel**

Make the **HISTORICAL JUMP** with me into the world the **BIBLE**. The same fears, concerns, and uncertainty were widespread in Israel at the time John the Baptist called for the repentance of sin and a life of holiness. Now, I want you to consider the experiences the people of the Gospels had encountered.

Luke's introduction to the story of John the Baptist is designed to give us a fairly precise date for the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:1-2). Actually, it gives us much more. Behind a list of names and places is a story of oppression and misery that was building to the point of revolt, with the year 6 AD being crucial, the year the Romans took the last piece of autonomy from Israel and began to rule the nation from inside the borders. The pagan empire that had contained the nation from the outside now invaded and oppressed from within. Again, Israel was overrun by a pagan empire.

Here is the overview:

- 160 BC: Israel gained her freedom through the Maccabean Revolt, a moment and memory of Jewish Identity and Liberty.
- 63 BC: Romans invade and conquer the Jewish kingdom. Israel ruled by Jewish (or semi-Jewish) leaders approved or appointed by Rome.
- 6AD: Rome removes appointed leaders and takes direct leadership of Jerusalem and appoints the High Priest. Tensions continue to mount.
- 66 AD: The Great Jewish Revolt is launched.
- 70 AD: The revolt fails when Roman soldiers breach the gates of Jerusalem, burn the city, and destroy the Temple.

The destruction of the city and Temple take place 40 years before the ministry of Jesus. Before the ministry of Jesus, events escalated the conflict between the Jews and the Romans. The internal divisions within the Jewish community further complicated the times.

We don't have all the social/political events that pushed the people toward revolt. No doubt there were many injustices, cruelties, and acts of oppression. There were promises broken, moments of treachery, and spies on every side. However, we know a few key moments that led to revolt.

**8 BC Herod the Great**, in a general atmosphere of paranoia, orders the deaths of his own sons, Aristobulus and Alexander. Shortly before his own death, Herod has another son executed.

**4 BC Herod the Great** dies an excruciating death known as "Herod's evil." Scholars agree, Herod suffered throughout his life from depression and paranoia. He feared that no one would mourn his death. To make sure people mourned, he commanded a large group of distinguished men to come to Jericho. He took them captive and commanded that they should be killed at the time of his death. (His son and sister did not carry out his wishes.) His kingdom (Israel) was divided into three parts. Jesus was probably born in 4 BC., before the death of Herod the Great. (NOTE: Jesus was born in 4 BC. See <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/when-was-jesus-born-bc-or-ad/>)

**6 AD. Herod Archelaus**, son of Herod the Great and ruler of Judea, ruled so badly that the Jews and Samaritans brought a united appeal to Rome requesting he should be deposed. He was banished to Gaul

**6 AD. Coponius** becomes the first Roman Prefect in Judea ending all Jewish autonomy. Roman soldiers entered Jerusalem much to the outrage of many. This year set in motion the revolt that would come 60 years later.

**6 AD. The Roman Prefect** took up general residence in Israel, living in Caesarea, which is on the Mediterranean coast. In addition, the Roman governor had a palace in Jerusalem.

**6 AD. Herod Antipas**, son of Herod the Great, was given permission to rule Galilee and Northern Israel. He ruled as a Roman tyrant, with oppression and cruelty. The Jews did not regard him as a King.

**6 AD. Quirinius**, Roman General in Syria, conducts a census in Galilee. The census was in preparation for a new round of taxes. (Jesus was 10-12 at this time. He traveled to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph; Luke 2:41-52)

**6 AD. Judas, son of Ezekias**, led a revolt in Galilee, supported by the Pharisee Zadok. The revolt is repressed, and the rebels are crucified, but it

results in the birth of the Zealot movement, the members of which regard the God of Judaism as their only master. Jesus would have witnessed the crucifixions that sprouted across the Galilean hills.

**6 AD. Annas, High Priest** was appointed by the Roman Governor, Gratus. , This subjected the Temple in Jerusalem directly under Roman rule. From this point forward, all High Priests were appointed and deposed by the Romans.

**14 AD. Augustus Caesar**, the first emperor, died and was replaced by a ruthless man named **Tiberius**, who was already being worshiped as a god in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, the location of Israel.

**17 AD. A Jewish embassy** appealed to Emperor Tiberius for a reduction in the tax rate which was 19.3%.

**15 AD. Valerius Gratus** deposed four High Priests in his first three years in office. He then appointed Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas, the High Priest he deposed three years earlier.

**18 AD. Caiaphas** was appointed the High Priest and remained so for almost 20 years. He is the High Priest that condemned Jesus. *“Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about! <sup>50</sup> You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed” (John 11:49-50).*

**AT ISSUE: Jewish Identity under Roman Rule** was the problem that begged for a solution. During the adult years of Jesus, the debate over the solution divided the nation into many groups and factions. Here are the major groups.

- The **Zealots** espoused the revolutionary option.
- The **Sadducees** were wealthy, aristocrats, and implemented compromise with Rome; they were most of the members of the Sanhedrin.
- The **Pharisees**, many of whom were Scribes, were idealists; trust the law as the way, an opening for legalism and hypocrisy.
- The **Essenes** solved the problem of Jewish identity under Roman occupation by moving to a monastic retreat in the desert.

There was anxiety, anger, and an awareness that’s something had to happen. This could not go on. But what?

**QUESTION:** Explain the experience of the common Israelites during the time. What were the “hopes and fears”? Construct a response to give to an farmer in Galilee or a shopkeeper in Jerusalem if they asked you, “I believe God is at work. How should I pray at this moment?”

**QUESTION:** Make it personal. Now, imagine a neighbor, a friend, or a family member seeks you out for spiritual advice. How would you instruct them to pray at this moment in the history of our nation?

### 3

#### **Anger and Angst on the Banks of the Jordan River**

All the emotions, all the splintered groups, and all the “hopes and fears of all the years” were meeting on the banks of the Jordan. Was God up to something new? Could the Lord Almighty provide a way of hope for his people? The promise has been given long ago, another like Moses will lead the people.

*Moses continued, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. . . .<sup>17</sup> “Then the Lord said to me, ‘What they have said is right. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:16-18).*

Devout Jews longed for a new word from God. Some believe that the era of prophecy had died. Others believe God would send another prophet to renew the old covenant and lead Israel out from under this new kind of slavery with a new Exodus. The old prophets had spoken of a time of renewal when God himself would return to them. No one was sure what that would look like, but when a fiery young prophet appeared along the Jordan River, people were ready to listen.

#### **THE WAY OF HOPE**

##### **Do Not Begin with Political Parties; begin with Personal Integrity**

John combined 1) a **physical image** of what God was about to go along with 2) a **written word** that came from the prophet Isaiah. Combined, the two anticipated a way of hope across the water and through the desert.

#### **ACROSS THE WATER – The action of baptism**

*“The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:2-3).*

The significance of John’s message was “*repentance for the forgiveness of sin.*” Luke indicates that John had a nomadic ministry. He not only preached in the desert but followed the Dead Sea coast north to the Jordan River. John's baptism was “*of repentance.*” He required sorrow for sin and a moral change in those being baptized. Repentance is an ancient theme of the prophets (e.g., Eze. 18:21, 30). The result of repentance culminating in baptism was forgiveness.

John baptized by plunging those who repented into the river Jordan. This was a potent sign of renewal. **THE HISTORY:** When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they were brought through the Red Sea, through the Sinai wilderness, and through the Jordan into the Promised Land. The story of the Exodus was the story they all knew well because of their regular Passover and other festivals.

Now, God's people were in slavery again in their own land. They were not held by the Pharaoh of Egypt but by the Roman Empire. They longed for a New Exodus to bring them freedom. Since the old prophets preached that this new slavery was the result of Israel's sin, worshipping idols rather than their true God, the New Exodus would include forgiveness of sin. The way to escape slavery, the last prophet of the Old Testament had written, was to return to God with heart and soul; this means they must repent.

*Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 3:7).*

This ritual was difficult for Jewish people to undergo. Baptism was something that Gentiles were required to do when they wanted to convert to Judaism. John was saying that the whole Nation of Israel needed to come back as if they were outsiders asking for acceptance into God's covenant. Although the nation was in trouble politically, John saw the issue as moral. The people must return to a way of life, a way of hope, as God intended for them to live, relate, and behave.

**QUESTION:** Political solutions or personal repentance? Why does John put the emphasis on personal repentance? What does repentance and the forgiveness of sin do for individuals and society that political solutions lack?

### **ACROSS THE DESERT – The Word of Isaiah**

John explained the act of baptism with a word from the prophet Isaiah, a word that is the turning point in the book of Isaiah. The passage comes at the moment the Exiles are told that **EXILE IS OVER** and they are welcome to return home.

*As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

*"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.*

*<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.*

*The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.*

*<sup>6</sup> And all people will see God's salvation."*

*(Luke 3:4-6, from Isaiah 40:3-5)*

The verse from Isaiah speaks of one preparing the way, the way of hope. The way in the wilderness described the promised New Exodus, a new era of salvation and restoration for God's people (Isa 11:16; 19:23 – 25; 43:16 – 21; 51:10 – 11; cf. Isa 49:8 – 12; 57:14). It is interesting to note that Mark, who also quotes Isaiah, ends the quotation with "*the rough ways smooth.*" Luke extends the quotation to include "*And all people will see God's salvation.*" As a Gentile, Luke has personally and profoundly experienced the Gentiles' conversion, the end of Exile for all people.

**From "repent" to "straight paths."** Roads would be improved before a great king traveled; Isaiah prophesied a New Exodus that meant an end to Exile. Luke goes into detail on preparing the way of hope.

*Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.*

We can see this type of work wherever we see a road under construction. The meaning for Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Luke is the need for repentance and intentional holy living.

**QUESTION:** As you assess your life in Christ this Advent season, consider the following question:

- What is too low (ignored) and must be filled in (raised up)?
- What is too lifted up and must be brought low (humble submission)?
- What is crooked (wrong) and must become straight (right)?
- What is the rough edge (harsh and difficult) and must be made smooth (gentle)?

December 16, 2018

## The Generosity of Hope

### Luke 3:7-18

#### When The World Is Falling Apart

In 1861, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow suffered a *personal tragedy* when his second wife of 18 years was killed in a fire. Fannie died after her dress caught on fire. Her husband woke from a nap, tried to extinguish the flames as best he could, first with a rug and then his own body, but she had already suffered severe burns. She died the next morning. Henry's facial burns were so severe that he could not attend his wife's funeral. He grew a beard to hide his facial face. At times he feared that he would be sent to an asylum on account of his grief.

In 1863, during the *National tragedy* of the American Civil War, Longfellow suffered another tragedy in his own family. His oldest son, Charles, joined the Union as a soldier without his father's blessing. Appointed as a lieutenant, and after participating on the fringe of the Battle of Chancellorsville in Virginia (April 30-May 6, 1863), Charley fell ill with typhoid fever and was sent home to recover. He rejoined his unit on August 15, 1863, having missed the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863). He was severely wounded in November. He recovered but his days of soldiering were finished. The bullet missed his spine by less than an inch.

On Christmas Day, 1863, Longfellow first wrote the poem, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*. The poem captures the vigorous dissonance in his own heart and in the world he saw around him. He heard the Christmas bells that December day and the singing of "peace on earth" (Luke 2:14). The song tells of his despair upon hearing Christmas bells: "*hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men*"

*And in despair I bowed my head  
There is no peace on earth I said  
For hate is strong and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men*

The experience of Henry Wadsworth links with the masses of people living during the ministry of Jesus. Let's review our Advent lessons:

**December 2:** Jesus warned the people that Jerusalem would fall; they were to run for the hills; and, "*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*" (Luke 21:28). When they see what should drive them to despair, look at it as the validation of God's Kingdom (vs. 31). This is a radical change in perspective – **The Anticipation of Hope.**

**December 9:** John the Baptist knew the political crisis in the land. He knew of the immorality, the loss of social mercy, and the imminent eruption of revolt. He interpreted this moment as the time for a New Exodus, symbolized in Baptism. The New Exodus makes the end of Exile as promised in the words of the prophet, *“In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord”* (Luke 3:4; Isaiah 40:3). This is not the end. This is God coming home to his people – **The Way of Hope.**

**Today, December 16:** John spells out the practical, spiritual, and theological means of a radical change in perspective – **The Generosity of Hope.**

We must see the world as God sees the world. This calls for a radical change in perspective. What is a change in perspective?

- James would say it, *“when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy”* (James 1:2).
- Paul advises, *“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop”* (Romans 5:3).
- Jesus observes, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:10).

John the Baptist is calling for a change in perspective. He outlines a plan, a method, and challenge we can apply in our lives.

- Take a **spiritual self-assessment** (vs. 7-9)
- Intentionally **practice generosity** (vs. 10-14)
- Embrace a **theological vision** (vs. 15-18)

### **1-Spiritual Self-Assessment (vs. 7-9)**

*John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And 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. <sup>9</sup>The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

John takes his listeners through a brutal process of spiritual self-assessment.

**Brood of vipers.** Many people in the ancient world thought that vipers (snakes) were born by hatching inside their mother, then gnawing their way through their mothers’ wombs — killing their mothers in the process. Comparing people to a *“brood of vipers,”* then, was analogous to calling them “parent-murderers” — one of the most reprehensible offenses conceivable. The “parent” of Israel was God himself. The Old Testament often refers to God’s compassion, a word that also means “womb.”

**QUESTION: *The assessment question:*** What is your lifestyle, what are your life decisions doing to God's plan to advance his Kingdom?

***Wrath to come.*** This is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as well as the final Judgment. John's language is strong, as was that of Old Testament prophets before him. He centers himself in God's anger (cf. Ro 2:5; 1Th 1:10), while Jesus is centered in God's kingdom (Luke 4:43). He questions the motive of those who are "*coming out to be baptized*" by him."

**QUESTION: *The Assessment question:*** If you are asking for spiritual renewal, take a look at your motives. What are your reasons for seeking spiritual renewal?

***Produce fruit.*** A tree that does not produce fruit should be chopped down and removed to make way for a tree that will produce fruit (cf. 6:43-45; 13:6-9). The picture calls to mind the image of Israel as a fig tree or vine (cf. Isa 5:1-7). Luke employs a picture that Jesus would develop later in his ministry. A tree is meant to bear fruit. If it does not bear fruit, it will be cut down (Luke 6:43-45). Genuine repentance leads to authentic goodness. Participating in baptism has meaning when our baptism experience is translated into practical action.

**QUESTION: *The assessment question:*** If my repentance is authentic, how then should I live? What should I stop doing. What should I begin to do? What changes do I need to begin to implement? Who and how will I acquire the support I need to make these changes?

***Abraham as our father.*** Mere physical descent from Abraham is not important (cf. John 8:31-43; Ro 9:6-8; Gal 3:6-9). God can create his own children out of stones, just as he can cause stones to praise his Son if humans remain silent (19:40). John's statement would have been reported to the authorities. At the time of John's ministry, being a direct descendant of Abraham was essential for inclusion in God's people. Faith was anchored in the promises made to Abraham and, thus, his descendants. To deny this would be to disavow the covenant with Abraham. Faith was attached to their birth certificates.

**QUESTION: *The assessment question:*** Where is your faith falsely fastened? Where is your faith rightly fastened? If faith is a relationship, how does one strengthen faith in Christ?

***The ax is already at the root of the trees.*** John the Baptist repeats his illustration of the tree that does not bear fruit. However, at this point, he is not talking about individuals. He is addressing the system of the Jewish Temple and rituals. "Temple" is the place where one meets with God. Jesus would indeed put the ax to "*the root of the tree*" (Luke 20:9-21:37), the Temple system. Our Lord predicted the moment the Temple would fall under Roman rage. The threat of

judgment is heightened through the imagery of fire, which consumed the city at its fall. Fire is a theme reintroduced in the reference to Jesus' ministry (vv.16-17). For those who listened and understood, the issue was clear: where do you stand, with the Temple or with the One who comes to replace the Temple?

**QUESTION: *The assessment question:*** Where does my true and lasting loyalty lie? Am I more comfortable trusting in things I can see and do? How do I learn to relax with unseeing faith, "*faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*" (Hebrews 11:1)?

## **2-Practical Generosity (vs. 10-14)**

John the Baptist moves from assessment to practical action. The crowd is ready. Often, reflecting through personal assessment prepares a person for practical instruction in what to do, "*What should we do then? asked the crowd.*"

<sup>10</sup> "*What should we do then?*" the crowd asked.

<sup>11</sup> John answered, "*Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.*"

<sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "*Teacher,*" they asked, "*what should we do?*"

<sup>13</sup> "*Don't collect any more than you are required to,*" he told them.

<sup>14</sup> Then some soldiers asked him, "*And what should we do?*"

He replied, "*Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.*"

He gives three examples of how repentance is lived out in generosity. The list is illustrative, not complete. John provides the first illustration and the other two illustrations are offered by people in the crowd. (TEACHERS: you have reached a teachable moment when students are asking, "*what should we do?*")

**First,** <sup>11</sup> John answered, "*Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.*"

A "shirt" was something like a long undershirt. Since two such garments were not needed, the second should be given to a person in need of one. **Practical question:** What do I have that I can give to someone in need?

**Second,** <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "*Teacher,*" they asked, "*what should we do?*"

<sup>13</sup> "*Don't collect any more than you are required to,*" he told them.

Jewish agents collected taxes for the Roman government. These agents were detested for helping the pagan Roman conqueror. Also,

they frequently deceived and swindled their own people out of more taxes than the people owed. **Practical question:** How am I cheating people and what must I sacrifice to stop?

**Third,** <sup>14</sup> *Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."*

The Romans allowed limited military forces for certain Jewish leaders and institutions such as those of Herod Antipas, the police guard of the temple, and escorts for tax collectors. It is possible that upon hearing the cry for help from the tax collectors, the assigned soldiers were also moved to ask for help. The professions of tax collector and soldier were not condemned, but the common unethical practices associated with them were. **Practical question:** What must I change to be a person of honor, virtue, and integrity?

### 3-Theological vision (vs. 15-18)

John has announced the new Exodus. John has called for personal moral reform. There is one more announcement he must make: he will announce the Messiah King.

<sup>15</sup> *The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.* <sup>16</sup> *John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* <sup>17</sup> *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."* <sup>18</sup> *And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.*

Of course, there was already a "king of the Jews." Herod Antipas was a kind of second-rate prince carrying on the work his father started in rebuilding the Temple. This was a way of claiming royal status. After all, King Solomon built the first Temple. To be seen as a temple builder was to be seen as a king and perhaps even the Messiah.

John the Baptist would have none of it. The true Messiah, the true king of the Jews, was coming, and his coming would bring devastating judgment. The idea that the Messiah was the Judge as well as Savior was embedded in the mainstream of Jewish expectations. The Messiah would bring God's justice to the world by naming and dealing with evil. John uses the image of the *fork* and the *fire*. The 1) farmer's fork separates the wheat from the chaff, and 2) the fire burns up the chaff once it has been separated.

The people at the edge of the Jordan listening to John preach, received, embraced, and believed that the arrival of the Messiah was imminent. It is understandable that they mistook John the Baptist for the Messiah. John answers by pointing out how the Messiah is different and superior to himself.

**First**, the Messiah is “*more powerful.*” The Messiah is worthy of such reverence that even the task of tying his sandals is more than John feels worthy of (cf. John 3:30). Carrying and tying sandals was the work of a slave. John (and by extension) everyone listening will accept the Messiah a Lord and King.

**Second**, the Messiah will “*baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.*” The Spirit has the effect of fire. Fire is an ancient symbol of judgment, refinement, and purification (cf. Genesis 19:26; Amos 7:4; Mal 3:2). John portrays the Holy Spirit as being active in saving, purifying, and judging.

Here it is – a change of perspective.

- There is the perspective of Chicken Little – “The sky is falling.”
- Then, there is the perspective of Jesus and John, “A new day is dawning.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow struggled with heartbreak and hopelessness on a dreary Christmas day when he wrote, “In despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth I said.” The clarity of a new perspective came to him.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead, nor does He sleep,  
For Christ is here; His Spirit near  
Brings peace on earth, good will to men.”

When men repent and turn from sin  
The Prince of Peace then enters in,  
And grace imparts within their hearts  
His peace on earth, good will to men.

O souls amid earth’s busy strife,  
The Word of God is light and life;  
Oh, hear His voice, make Him your choice,  
Hail peace on earth, good will to men.

Then happy, singing on your way,  
Your world will change from night to day;  
Your heart will feel the message real,  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.