

Title: THE METAPHORS AND THE MESSAGE OF JOHN, LUKE 3:1-6
(Chatham, NJ; 12/06/15, AM) [Pd – Exegesis]

Theme: God's Word to the world through John the Baptist is communicated through several metaphors that describe both his role and his message.

Purpose: To explain these metaphors and to use them as memorable facts that point to our salvation.

Introduction:

1. Luke 3:2 reports that the "word of God came to John," a standard expression revealing that God was speaking through the prophet.
2. He is John, the son of Zechariah, and Luke has already narrated the story of his birth and the role he will play in the scheme of salvation.
3. The word came to him "in the wilderness."
4. Though literally the place where John carried out his ministry, it echoes the wilderness wanderings where Israel received the words of the covenant and his laws.
5. John the Baptist is the last of a long line of prophets.
6. We learn John's message by how he is described.

I. Refiner's Fire and Launderer's Soap

- A. Malachi 3:1-4, the images of John
 1. Malachi speaks of God's messenger
 2. He asks, "Who can endure his coming?"
 3. He will be like a refiner's fire
 4. Something that purifies precious metals (1 Peter 1:6-7)
 5. Launderer's soap – also a cleansing agent
 6. Malachi 3:5 – the messenger will be a witness against evildoers
 7. 4:1 – the day of his coming will be like an oven
- B. John is that messenger
 1. Mal. 4:5-6 speaks of the coming of Elijah
 2. Luke 1:16-17 tells Zechariah that his son, John, will come in the spirit and power of Elijah
 3. Mt. 11:14, Jesus tells the disciples that John was Elijah, and he was the greatest prophet of all time
 4. Luke 3:3 tells us that John's message was one of repentance
 5. Repentance recognizes the impurities in our souls and changes the behaviors that displease God
 6. It is the first and necessary step to being united with him
 7. Refiner's fire and launderer's soap reveal and remind us of this
 8. We must purify our souls of sin

II. The Voice, 3:4-6

- A. "Crying in the wilderness"
 1. Literally outside developed regions of civilization
 2. Reminiscent of the wilderness experience of Israel, Deut. 8:2-6
 3. A time when God stripped away things that hindered faith
 4. A time of purification from the sinful habit of faithlessness
 5. They learned to live "by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord"
 6. Such was John's voice: turn to God
- B. Preparation for God's coming, 4-6 (more metaphors and images)
 1. Valleys will be filled

2. Mountains and hills will be smoothed out
3. Crooked will be made straight
4. Rough ways made level
5. John was a construction engineer of the human soul
6. All hindrances for returning to the creator of our souls will be removed
7. The way can be hard:
 - Prodigal son's predicament
 - Inner and external resistances
 - Guilt and shame
 - Peer pressure and mockery

C. The message

1. Listen to my voice
2. Watch my lead
3. God provides a way through the obstacles
4. All will see this salvation: Luke 1:77-79, knowledge, forgiveness, light, and guidance are the characteristics of John's message

Conclusion:

1. Never forget the images.
2. Purifying fire and cleansing soap
3. Valleys filled, hills smoothed, rough ways made level, and crooked made straight
4. John cried out in the wilderness: repent
5. His voice still speaks today.
6. It points to the one who came after him: Jesus.
7. His coming is all about the Gospel of salvation and forgiveness of sins.
8. He is the one who can purify.