

“We Have Abraham as Our Father”

Luke 3:1-14

When John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, many people, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees, saw no reason to submit to John’s Baptism. In the ancient Jewish tradition, Gentiles who wished to convert to the Jewish faith would go through a ceremonial washing – the entire family; even the babies.

The Jews believed that they had already been in-grafted into Abraham’s covenant through their family tree and their circumcision. They believed that they were the children of the promise because they could say: “We have Abraham as our father.” The Pharisees developed “kinship laws” so that they could determine who was and was not truly a Jew. If there were too many “Gentile branches” in your family tree, the Jewish leaders could exclude you from fellowship.

They had missed the point of God’s promise in Genesis chapter 12 that the Seed of Abraham would be a blessing to all nations. Some of Christ’s most harsh criticisms of the Pharisees was concerning their kinship laws. Throughout His

ministry, Jesus shows time and again that membership in the kingdom of God or Abraham's family is through faith, not through bloodlines and genealogies.¹ This is a good lesson for us that we don't ever sit in judgment over others who aren't "German" enough, or Scandinavian enough, or have too many "other" branches in the family tree.

In the days prior to Christ entering upon the scene and establishing His public ministry, the Pharisees and Sadducees get called out through the preaching of John on this very subject.

John knows that if any of the Pharisees are actually coming to him for baptism, then they are being hypocritical if they are consistent with their own teaching, since they teach that baptism is unnecessary for them due to their adherence to the law and their proud family ancestry.² This is why John specifically calls them a "brood of vipers" because this attitude comes from Satan.

Then not only does John say that they are from Satan, but he hurls a great insult at their proud ancestry. John said: "For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." If God can give a son to Abraham through his 90 year old wife Sarah whose womb was as useless as a stone, then God could raise up children for Abraham from these useless rocks lying on the ground.

Therefore, if God can give Abraham children from stones, don't you think that God could also raise up children for Abraham from the Gentiles? And the means by which God does this is the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (This is not a ceremonial washing like that of the Jewish tradition whereby Gentiles could gain some access into the Jewish religious community. This was a

¹Just, Arthur A. *Luke*, p. 152.

²Ibid.

Baptism by which anyone could truly enter the family of Abraham.)

This is what God has done for the world. God has provided the means by which He can bring all of mankind into the family of Abraham. All of God's people have Abraham as a common bond, but the bond is not made through the blood of Abraham or being found on his family tree. The bond is Christ, the Messiah who would be the final Lamb of sacrifice. Abraham's faith was faith in the coming Christ, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness.

We now are the children of Abraham. We are heirs of that promise. The One True God is not "The God of the Jews;" He is "The God of Israel" – and we are the new Israel justified by faith in Christ. St. Paul preaches this same message and spends the first four/five chapters of his letter to the Romans making this same point. We are the new Israel. We are the baptized, holy nation of God. We are the people who God has called to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance," as John the Baptist said.

When John preached this message, the Jews became uncomfortable. That is not a bad thing. God's Word should make you uncomfortable on a regular basis. The call to repent should make you uncomfortable. When you say, "I am a poor, miserable sinner," if that looking inside yourself doesn't make you uncomfortable, then you need to look again. In reality, if God's Word never makes you uncomfortable, then you might be worshiping an idealized version of yourself.

When John preached this message, the Jews became uncomfortable. Those who truly heard his message repented and were baptized. But he made everyone uncomfortable because, if what he says is true, then this changes everything. Everything that they had placed their hopes on (their family tree, their blood ties to Abraham); all of this was now seen to be a non-factor. So they asked John: "What shall we do?"

John told the tax collectors not to collect more than they should, and he told the soldiers not to abuse their authority and extort money from the people. John gives the people general guidelines to demonstrate how repentance expresses itself in daily life. Repentance involves change. If you say, "I repent of my sin," but nothing in your daily life ever changes, you might want to look again.

As children of Abraham, having been brought into God's family through our baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, we are changed people. Through no work of our own, we are declared not guilty, holy, righteous in the sight of God. In response to this, we are called to be generous and merciful – to be trees that bear good fruit, and to see this demonstrated in the daily conduct of our life. Not trusting in ourselves, who we are, or where we come from. Not judging others because of who they are or where they come from – God can raise up children from stones and call them His own.

But we are like Abraham, who was called by God out of the godless land in which he was born; brought into the Promised Land; and even though the fulfillment of God's promise concerning the land was not realized until after Abraham died – he lived in the surety that his faith was credited to him as righteousness.

The fulfillment of God's promise to us of eternal life will not be fully revealed until after we die – unless Jesus returns first. However, we have been called out of our godless existence through the waters of baptism, and we now offer our lives as a meager thank offering for God's great gifts – and like Abraham, our faith has been credited to us as righteousness. We have Abraham as our father. Amen.