

People who spend large amounts of time exercising can rightly expect a better body than when they started. Employees who put in long hours and lots of extra effort on a proposal expect to land a nice fat bonus check. Fans who put in a couple hours watching their favorite sports team expect them to win. When we put in time, money, or effort it's nice to have the payoff of getting something in return. We've put effort into preparing ourselves for the coming of the Savior; our payoff is we expect him to come.

That day is not quite here. Even when Christmas comes that day still might not quite be here. Remember Advent is about waiting yes for Christ's first coming at Christmas, but even more than that we're waiting for his second coming on the Last Day. Continuing last week's gospel Luke writes more about John the Baptist's message. The payoff is coming soon...

**The Lord's drawing near, Rejoice!**  
**Respond with repentance**  
**Bring out the good fruits**

It would have been a different start to worship today if I had started yelling at you when you walked in. I could have asked each of you who warned you that it would be good to be found in church this morning. I could've called you names like brood of vipers. You probably would have thought I was crazy. What would our visitors have thought? Yet that's just the harsh tone John started with to the people actually coming out to the wilderness. **"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"** John saw past the numbers of people coming and saw deception and hypocrisy in their hearts. They couldn't stop John so they would pretend to join him.

Are you here to satisfy your parents? Do you mouth along with the words but don't really say them? Maybe sleeping in would be better? Just making it through the hour should make God happy. Or is it the programs we offer that have you coming? The youth group is fun because you can get together and talk with friends. You enjoyed Advent by Candlelight or the Fall Family Festival. But maybe you'd have no trouble walking away without these programs. What we teach isn't as important as what we can offer you or your kids. Who warned you to come today?

The people coming to John were faking it. They didn't desire baptism. They thought simply showing up was good enough for God. John alerted them it wasn't good enough. **"The ax is already at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."** God knew their deceptive intentions. Judgment was coming that would cut them down. Nothing's changed in our time. The ax is at our roots. Judgment could come at any time. You can't avoid it. You can't fake your way past God. God sees every sinful action. He knows your sinful insincere worship. He knows the sinful things you whisper in secret. No sin escapes him.

If I face certain judgment, what's my reason for rejoicing then? Listen to John, **"I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."** In sin we have a heart of stone. God took our wicked hearts and raised up children of Abraham. His amazing love in Christ turned us to respond with true repentance. Rejoice because we can honestly recognize our sinfulness. There's no need for half-hearted worship. There's no need to try and get away with as much as possible while we still have time. Children of God don't operate that way. God's grace works a change so we can openly confess the deep hurt our sins cause. God works true repentance which looks to Christ alone and trusts in him as the Savior. God loves you and saves you. We were nothing, but the Lord draws near, Rejoice!

There might be many reasons why someone would take down a tree in their yard. It blocks a view, got too big, it got too close to the house. These are subjective reasons for cutting down a tree. One person might say it blocks the view another might like the privacy. But if it's a fruit tree no longer producing fruit it's dead and gets cut down to make way for another one. No sense leaving it standing. Picture yourself as your favorite fruit tree. A Christian who doesn't have a repentant attitude and ceases to produce fruit is in danger of being cut down. But Christians with a proper repentant attitude continue to produce fruit. They are living trees and John encourages them to keep it up and bring out the good fruit.

Teachers, parents, and even grandparents will tell you there's no such thing as a bad question. If you don't understand something you won't unless you ask a question. The people John spoke to were puzzled. They didn't understand. So they asked, **"What should we do then? Tax collectors also came to be baptized. Teacher, they asked, what should we do? Then some soldiers asked him, and what should we do?"** The questions were so simple; John's answer even more simple. Bear fruit. Basically it's this; stop doing the sin you're repenting of. Restore as much as possible of what sin destroyed. Replace evil with good in your life. And when doing everything, do it all to the glory of God. That's it, that's how you respond to God's gift, that's how a Christian produces good fruit.

“But what about me,” you might ask. “I’m an engineer, or I’m a student, or I’m retired person. How do I bear fruit and show people that Christ has changed my life?” John couldn’t give an example from every profession of the people who came to him and I can’t either. But he laid down some basic principles I think work. **“The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.”** If you have something that others don’t, quit being selfish and share. Every one of you exists in this world; some have more and some less. Take note of those with less and find ways to help them. **“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,”** John told the tax collectors. Deal with people fairly be it in money or time. Treat others fairly and you’ll be more likely to be treated fairly. **“Don’t accuse people falsely.”** Get to know a person before you judge them. Don’t look down on the sinful behavior of other people, even if you’re aware of it. You aren’t that far away from being that person. Remember Christ saved us all, including the worst of sinners...you.

That’s just some of the fruit you’ll bear. The Bible is full of practical suggestions on living life how God wants it done. But you’ll fail. I’ll fail. We’ll all fail. And when we do we really rejoice because one more powerful is coming. **“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.”** Sounds scary, but for you it’s reason to rejoice. You’re the wheat. When Jesus comes in judgment he’ll toss everybody up and let the Spirit blow away the unbelieving chaff that doesn’t belong in heaven. What will be left are believers like you and me. Christ will gather us up into his barn, heaven. There we’ll never leave. There we’ll be safe for eternity.

Farmers don’t congratulate trees when they produce fruit. They’re supposed to do that. A tree can’t get credit for doing what it’s supposed to do. Christian, don’t expect God to congratulate you for the fruit you produce. Don’t expect credit before him. Rather the fruit you produce is a product of God’s grace. He allows you to produce it, it’s a gift to him, and without him you would have nothing. The good fruit you produce shows the repentance in your heart. You demonstrate for others that Christ does make a difference in your life. You’re showing that because the Lord is coming you have reason to rejoice.