

John the Baptist and the Fire of God 1

Leonard Ravenhill:

Luke 3:16

We are going to look into the Gospel as recorded by Luke and the third chapter.

I suppose most of us can quote John 3:16 without looking at it. How many of us can quote Luke 3:16? It's the other side of the coin, it should be as well known. Well, here it is... in the good King James version.

Luke 3 verse 16: "John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost" and in this version, "and with fire:" but the original says: "Holy Ghost fire." Because God is a consuming fire. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of fire. And Jesus said, "I've come to bring fire on earth." There is no escaping fire. This is a kind of a cliché of mine, but I still get a lift out of saying it, I believe that tonight the world is going to hell fire because the church has lost Holy Ghost fire, it's as simple as that.

Between Malachi and Mathew you've got

Four hundred years of blackness without any prophetic light.

Four hundred years of stillness without any prophetic voice.

And then suddenly, dramatically, unexpectedly this strange man, John the Baptist, came streaking across a sky that was totally black. The Word says he was a "burning and a shining light." Jesus, the greatest character in history, says, "There was no man comparable to John Baptist." Not Isaiah not Jeremiah not any of those towering saints. He is a very, very remarkable character.

John the Baptist appears in the wilderness. It was not only a wilderness geographically,

it was a wilderness morally,

it was a wilderness politically,

it was a wilderness religiously.

You see, you go back in the Scripture and you read about Ezrah and Nehemiah. They established a governership over Israel made of a hundred and twenty priests and rulers. These priests and elders ruled over Israel. Four hundred and fifty years they dominated that nation. I say: this was a jungle, theologically.

In 170 BC there was a man with the strange name of Antiochus Epiphanes. You need to look up his name and his relatives. He took over Jerusalem, he polluted the temple, he made the Jews sacrifice to idols, he built a statue of Jupiter where the the altar of the burnt offering should have been. He burnt the Scriptures publicly. He prohibited the worship of Jehovah. And all this horrendous stuff went on. In 37 BC came Herod the Great. He betrayed the nation to the Romans, he fostered immorality, he massacred the noble people, he built that magnificent temple that was standing.

Now with this horrendous background of murder and rape and debauchery and suffering and agony, John Baptist steps on the stage. A remarkable character.

You see, today we try to organize. We try to get a bunch of people together. God never did that. God takes individual men. He takes Moses to the backside of the desert. John the Baptist was in the wilderness until the day of his showing forth.

Jesus, the Son of God who had left the Glory, spent thirty years in training to minister!

John Baptist thirty years in training.

The apostle Paul at least thirty years.

Moses at least forty years;

and we want to go to Bible School six months and come out like a super prophet! It's the time factor that kills most of us. Tell me how much time you spend alone with God and I will tell you how spiritual you are.

Not how many meetings you go to.

Not how many gifts you have.

Not how many sermons you preach.

Not how many records you've made.

Tell me what time you spend alone with God...

and I'll tell you how spiritual you are.

The Word here tells me about this remarkable man, John the Baptist, that he was in the wilderness until the day of his showing forth. Going forth at the command of God Himself, of course.

He was in the wilderness, of all places. It says he had his dwelling among wild beasts, ferocious things. The remarkable thing to me, as I read this again today, is this: he had no role model. Elisha had Elijah. Joshua had Moses as a role model. Timothy had Paul as a super model in front of him. And right through the Scripture you find these men that have lived with some giant and they've become like him. But this man has no model before him. What did he do wandering on the rocks? "He ate wild honey," it says. And he was with wild beasts... and he was a wild man.

Luke chapter 3 gives you a kind of run down on the awesomeness of this man's ministry. Look this first verse.

"... the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Ceasar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip the tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests,"

That's about as refreshing as a mouth full of sand, isn't it? What in the world do you do with it? Except it gives you a framework. "Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests," that's illegal. They could only have one high priest and they got two. Then came "John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Boy, that's a dirty thing to preach these days. Who preaches repentance? There is an old hymn that says, Repentance is

"to leave the sins I've done before,
and show that I in earnest grieve,
by doing them no more."

Repentance is more than saying, "I'm sorry." Repentance is mental. It's something in my mind, I'm going this way and I turn that way.

When I'm going this way I'm saying,
"God is in the wrong and I am in the right."

When I turn around I say,
"God is in the right, if He sends me to hell He is in the right."

That is repentance. It's not just repenting for the sin I've done, it's repenting about the motive that made me do the sin. It's going past the fruit to the root because if the root of corruption is there, there is going to be fruit coming out that is wrong. Romans 6 talks about having your fruit unto Holiness and it's talking there to regenerate people, not people that claim to be filled by the Holy Ghost.

John goes out, stands and ministers there. And they come to him. He is a success any way you count it. Geographically - they come from the North and South and East and West. He is a success socially. They came from all levels of society. He said to the multitude that came to be baptized, "you generation of vipers." Isn't that pleasant? Do you know anybody who'd dare stand up in the First Baptist or the Last Baptist Church tomorrow morning and say, "You generation of vipers. I'm sick of talking to you." Uh? They would sure take a love offering for him, wouldn't they? To get him out of town! "Oh generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He was not only condemning their sin, he was saying, "there is a gate, and when you get through it, it is eternal wrath from God."

We have forgotten about the wrath of God. A friend saw a bumper sticker and you know what it said on it? "Jesus is coming and He is as mad as hell." Sacrilege? No. II Thessalonians 1 says, He is coming in flaming fire in judgment on this world. In other words, He's as mad as hell. May be it is a bad way of putting it, but it's the truth. You see, we are all looking for "gentle Jesus meek and mild." The attitude of the average Christian today is relax and be raptured. But He is coming with flaming vengeance on this world. There is a time when His Spirit's forbearance runs out. There is going to be a day of the vengeance of God. And when God gets angry you've no idea what it is. Like a thousand volcanoes exploding. He has appointed a day in which He is going to judge the world

and the poor blind world doesn't know much about it,
and the poor blind church doesn't think much about it now.

Let me look at this in Exodus 32. "Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp. And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the

tabernacle the cloudy pillar descended." It was a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.

If you were in London going past where the queen lives and somebody says, "The queen is at home," you would wonder how does he know. Well, because when she is at home the flag is flying, when she is not at home it's not there. I believe the sign of God's presence in a sanctuary is the pillar of fire. It's the living vibration of an Eternal God who stands in the midst and does something you can't explain. God is beyond definition. I cannot explain Him. I can experience Him. I know when He touches me as I am alone in the night, two or three o'clock in the morning. I know when His Living Presence comes into my office in a special wave of anointing.

But notice He did not come until they went outside the camp!!

There are very, very, few occasions when God Almighty has revived dead denominations. The men who stirred their generations had to go outside the camp. Doesn't it say in Hebrews 13:12 that

He went outside the camp?! That's fine, but when it comes to verse 13

you go outside the camp and bear His reproach. Maybe before long God will bring a cleavage somewhere in this city, I hope He does. And you will have to get outside of the camp. You will have to leave your group, and you will have to go join a people who have the anointing of God. They may be poor, and have no stained glass window, and beautiful choir...

I am impressed with this, you may not be, but I am. Verse 9: "It came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle.... And all the people saw the cloudy pillar." Wouldn't it be wonderful...? Imagine if you could answer your child as one of those Israeli mothers would. Her little boy wakes up at night and says,

"Mommy, sometimes I think of those days we were in Egypt, I think about that terrible journey we made and I wonder what's going to happen." She puts her arms around him and says, "Darling, you see that? That pillar of fire over there? That's the holy place. Our Holy God brands it with His presence of fire."

Doesn't it say in Hebrews that God makes His Angels ministering Spirits, and His ministers flames of fire? We've got snowmen in the pulpits with icicles hanging all around. If ever the fire comes there'll be some melting!

I say again, this man John Baptist has no pattern before him. I believe this man walked up and down amongst the wild beasts, and there he is, he doesn't eat much. Some big flies, you know, a bit bigger than these horrible things that eat my garden up, grasshoppers. Big, big things, he caught them, put them on a rock and roasted them. Three times a day he had locust burgers. Nothing else to eat except locusts and wild honey. And yet the people come near to hear him. I'll say it again, for my comfort if not yours: You never have to advertise a fire. Whether it's spiritual or a physical fire. The most self advertising thing in this world is a fire.

I remember getting home between one and two o'clock a morning in England.

I said to my wife, "Sweetheart, one of the big mills in town is on fire, let's go. It's nearly two o'clock, there'll be nobody there." Everyone in the city woke up with the same idea, so they all went. We couldn't get within three blocks of the place. I said, "Sweetheart, we'll go 'round..." We went around in our little car, you know, those tiny little things. Well, we got half way down the street it was so fierce we could not even stand there, the fire was so terrible in it's majesty. This huge mill burning.

I wonder how many of us have really seen a man who is on fire for God.

When the Holy Ghost came in the upper room, how did He come? Did He come as a dove? -- When Jesus received His baptism the Spirit came as a dove upon Him. There was nothing in Him to purify. He comes to us in fire because we need purification.

I remember a night in Gillingham, east of London. We rented a church. I'll tell you who came, if you've read "God's Smuggler," he talks in there about a man called Uncle Hoppy. Well, Uncle Hoppy "hopped" in the meeting that day.

He came in the most broken down automobile I've ever seen. He was nuts, pardon the phrase, but he was sanctified nuts. He came in clothes that were almost worn out. He bought all his clothes at the Salvation Army. This old car came wheezing up the street, rheumatism in all the wheels and asthma in the motor. It was sobbing and groaning as it came up the hill... but he was giving thousands of dollars away to missions!

He stayed with us for a half night of prayer.

I'll never forget that night of prayer. There were surgings of blessings. There were times when God so came in power, I was afraid to open my eyes. We started praying at nine o'clock. Between one and two in the morning

we were going out. There was an old lady at the back, sitting in a wheel-chair; a white-haired lady. "Oh, brother," she said, (she didn't know any of our names,) "Wasn't it wonderful!" I said, "It was." "One of the best... I've been in many prayer meetings, this was one of the greatest, most powerful. Wasn't it wonderful?" I said, "Sure, I said that." "Did you feel anything different about one o'clock?" I said, "Yes, I felt a hand or something came... I felt a quickening in my spirit." "It was just then." "Just then what?" "You didn't see it?" "No, no, I was with my head down praying." She said, "A tongue of fire came down on the head of the first, went to the next, went to the next, went to the next, right to the end. It was awesome." No wonder everyone of us felt a wonderful insurgence of the Life of God... Or the power of God, define it as you will.

You see, there is a great deal of difference between revival and evangelism. I am so sick to death, I hardly read any reports of meetings that come to me. Everybody is getting half of America saved. If you add all the lists of people saved, everybody in America, the whole population has been saved and filled with the Holy Ghost about six times over in the last ten years. And yet we are as dumb and as dead and as damned as we were when we started off.

You want to know what preaching is? Study this third chapter in the Gospel of Luke, and when you've read that read the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles where Paul is standing before a heathen king in a pagan court and says, "God called me to preach." And He summarizes what preaching is:

it's to open the eyes of the blind,
to turn them from darkness to light,
from the power of Satan unto God,

that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

People come to the altar, yes, but meet them at the door and ask what happened. "Oh, ah, ah, ah, ah. I confessed my sins." There is not one evangelist in fifty in America today preaching salvation. They are preaching forgiveness. "Just come and get forgiven." That is not salvation. Jesus came to do more than forgive us our sins.

He came for something more,
He came to rescue us from hell,
He came to rescue us from sin and sinning.

Not just our past sin, but to stop this damnable business that makes God so sad. "He that is born of God does not" N-O-T "do not commit sin." You say it's impossible not to sin. It is possible for us not to sin.

What happened when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost? What does it say? They were pricked in their hearts. After that Stephen preached. And when he preached the same thing happened. Peter on the day of Pentecost says to the men he had ran away from: "You crucified the Lord of Glory. You killed Him." Stephen says, "You murdered the son of God."

That is preaching.

When Nathan the prophet went to David, he didn't say, "You know, some of you are guilty." Did he? He said, "Thou art the man!"

Oh, people say, "I'd love to go to a Holy Ghost church." Would you? Will you love to hear somebody say, "Hey fellow, listen, last night you committed adultery. You embezzled some money this week. You've got a spirit of hatred which God says is as bad as committing murder?" Again, Jesus came not to save us just from sins, but from sinning. When they heard these men, they were pricked in their hearts.

I go back into the third chapter, verse 7, he says, "Oh, generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruit meet for repentance." And quit saying "we have Abraham to our father." Isn't this nice. He called them vipers and now he says, "God can do as much through stones as through Abraham. Don't boast of Abraham; if God wants He'll turn those stones into children to worship Him." That's pretty much exhausting their theology, isn't it? In verse 9 he says, "The ax is laid unto the root of the trees, every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, '...'" He didn't ask them! They were so conscious of guilt, they felt as though they had some serpent or scorpion stinging them. They didn't dare look back because of their sins. They didn't dare look forward because of judgment. They didn't dare look round about them, somebody might come pouncing on them. And so they cried out.

This is revival!

It's not singing some sentimental chorus, then giving the invitation: "Would you like to come? Jesus is

waiting, wringing His hands in heaven, He would be so upset if you don't come." Jesus doesn't care a hill of beans whether you come or not. He's done everything He can do for you. You have to do the rest. He is not going to whip you into submission. He is not going to demand, though you sing, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." It's on your side to do it. But notice who they were.

Verse 10 The people asked him, "What shall we do?"

Verse 12, "Then came also the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?"

Verse 14 the soldiers, they were Romans, they lived in a pagan society, they'd never seen a man on fire for God. They'd never seen a priest who didn't care a bit about his trimmings.

Remember how this man was born. His father Zacharias went into the temple and as he got there to the altar, there was an angel on the right side... And he says to him, "Fear not... your wife is going to bear a son." And God does a miracle to raise that child up. Zacharias did this once in his life only. There is a line behind him of at least two thousand priests, all waiting for the one time in their life when they'll go in long white garment and enter into the Holy Place. Which is awesome. When he gets in there, there's a marvelous person by the name of Gabriel: "Fear not. I have a message from God for you."

If you haven't had it, if you walk with God, one day you will go to a meeting and you'll think God Almighty is talking to nobody in that congregation but you. Why is He singling me out?

Because you have the ears to hear which you didn't have before.

Because you have a hunger for God you never had before.

COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION LIMITATIONS: This data file is the sole property of Leonard Ravenhill. It may not be altered or edited in any way. It may be reproduced only in its entirety for circulation as "freeware," without charge. All reproductions of this data file must contain the copyright notice (i.e., "Copyright (C) 1997 by Leonard Ravenhill."). This data file may not be used without the permission of Leonard Ravenhill for resale or the enhancement of any other product sold. This includes all of its content with the exception of a few brief quotations. Please give the following source credit: Copyright (C) 1997 by Leonard Ravenhill, Lindale Texas - <http://www.ravenhill.org/>