

December 17, 2016

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Scripture

Luke 3:1-9

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” ⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Devotional

“I am going to write a word on the board,” I sometimes tell my Bible students. “It is a short, common word, but you will be unable to pronounce it, or to tell me exactly what it means.” I then take a piece of chalk and write, “R-E-A-D.” Of course, whether “read” is pronounced “reed” or “red,” and whether it is present or past tense, depends upon its context. Knowing that context matters, Luke pays careful attention to where and when and to whom John proclaimed the day of the Lord and grounds John’s words in a particular time and place. So too, *our* ministry has a context. We also serve in a very particular time and place—*here* and not there, *now* and not then. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is no abstraction. It is real life for real people—like us.

Prayer

Holy Lord, we would prefer an abstract faith, lofty and spiritual. Remind us that, just as our incarnate Lord comes into our messy, fleshy world, so we are sent to actual people in actual places with actual needs. Help us, Abba, to keep it real! *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.