THE FUNCTION OF THE STANDESPREDIGT IN LUKE 3:1-20
A RESPONSE TO E H SCHEFFLER'S THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF THE LUCAN BAPTIST (LK 3:10-14)

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ABSTRACT
Reacting to an article by E H Scheffler in 1990 the author discusses Luke's use of the Q-tradition in his transmission of the Baptist-narrative in Luke 3:1-20. The author questions Scheffler's conclusion that Luke changed the harshness of the Q-tradition because of his social-ethical stance. Whereas Scheffler argues that Luke softened the judgemental character of John's message, the author maintains that Luke did not alter the harshness of the Baptist's message as he found it in Q, but rather that he wished to emphasise what the proper reaction to this message of coming judgement was, and who responded to this message. Both the Q-tradition as well as the Standespredigt are discussed in an attempt to clarify Luke's intent with the passage.

INTRODUCTION

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He then follows with a discussion of each of these elements and especially their relation to the Sondergut of verse 10-14.


1 JOHN THE BAPTIST: MISSIONARY PREACHER OR PROPHET?

Scheffler (1990:23) takes Luke 3:3-6 as showing that John the Baptist was a "type of missionary preacher", because of the εἰς πᾶσαν περὶχωρον τοῦ ἱορθάνου in 3:3. "In his version of John's preaching of repentance (Lk 3:3-6; par Mk 1:2-6), Luke portrays John as the one who took the initiative and went out in every district about the Jordan (contra Mk 1:4). This view of John as a type of "missionary preacher" (cf Schneider 1977:85) who goes out (ἡλθεν) to preach the release of sins not only tones in with the well-known motif of Luke's universalism (πᾶσαν...περὶχωρον), but also with his view of John as primarily a preacher of salvation rather than mere doom" (Scheffler 1990:23). However, although Luke portrays John as going out into every district preaching, it does not necessarily make him a 'type of missionary preacher'. To hold this view is to ignore the fact that John is portrayed in much the same way as the Old Testament prophets in Luke 3:2: "...during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the desert" (italics mine). Mar-

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1 It is unfortunate that Scheffler does not explain what he means by 'type of missionary preacher'. This is also true of Schneider whom he refers to in this quotation. What is clear from both this quotation and from Schneider (1977:85) is that John is regarded as a 'missionary preacher' because he goes out into every district to preach. In other words: because John goes about preaching in the whole district of the Jordan, he is to be understood as a missionary preacher. The implication is that it is characteristic of only 'missionary preachers' to go out into every district to preach. Surely this inference needs to be substantiated and cannot merely be taken for granted. 'Missionary preacher' as a term is also problematic because it is an anachronism.
shall (1978:134) says in this regard: ‘Luke describes in a style typical of the call of the prophets how the word of God came to John’. Bovon (1989:169) also remarks on this ‘prophetic calling’ of John: ‘Die Tradition über Johannes gestaltet er zu einer Berufungsszene, die dem Anfang eines prophetischen Buches gleicht’. The fact that John went out in every district of the Jordan does not make him a missionary preacher, although this might indeed be an indication of Luke's universalism, as Scheffler claims (1990:23). However, the point I wish to make is that one cannot deduce from the fact that John went out into every district that he was a ‘missionary preacher’ and equate his message on these grounds as ‘salvation rather than mere doom’ as Scheffler does.

This is confirmed by the way John opens his sermon in Luke 3:7. One only has to look at his introductory phrase ‘you brood of vipers, who told you to flee from the coming wrath?’ to realise that John is not just preaching the release of sins. The fact that he commences by describing the people as a ‘brood of vipers’ shows that they are under the judgement of God. Bovon remarks on the resemblance to traditional prophetic utterances: ‘Formgeschichtlich liegt die Gattung der prophetischen Droh- und Gerichtsorakel vor’ (1989:171). In the time of Luke this probably meant that the judgement of Israel had already taken place because they did not repent, while simultaneously serving to warn his listeners not to be complacent: ‘Die Drohworte des Johannes sind zur Zeit des Lukas zum gefallenen Urteil geworden...Möglichwerise überliefern er diese Worte gerade auch deshalb, um seine Adressaten vor einer falschen Sicherheit zu warnen und sie vor einem ähnlichen Schicksal zu bewahren’ (Bovon 1989:171).

Thus it is obvious from both the ‘prophetic calling’ and introductory speech of John that one cannot simply disregard Luke 3:2,7 and describe John as a ‘missionary preacher’. Whereas it seems that Scheffler expects a ‘missionary preacher’ to preach primarily salvation, it can be expected of a ‘prophetic preacher’ to preach that the judgement of God is imminent. John's preaching of repentance is rooted in the fact that the people are living under the judgement of God: ‘Like the (initial) ritual bath of the Qumran community, the baptism of John appears to have functioned as a rite of passage to the eschatological community, the true Israel, who alone would be vindicated by God in the Day of Judgement’ (Aune 1983:129).²

It must moreover be stressed that Luke only portrays John as preaching doom. When the people asked the Baptist what they were to do to escape this judgement (Luke 3:10,12,14), it is true that in identifying the toll-collectors and soldiers, he replied with answers that were in keeping with his (Luke's) social ethical stance. It should, however, be kept in mind, reading 3:10-14, that Luke's

² This is not to deny that John's message implicitly refers to salvation as well. However, the focus of his message is not salvation. He is not proclaiming salvation ‘free for all’, instead he urges people to repent in order to escape the coming judgement.
presentation does not portray the Baptist as giving information on how to escape the judgement unless he is asked. In fact, if one keeps in mind that Luke 3:15-18 again contains only judgement, it cannot be ignored that John's preaching—although Luke does include 3:10-14—commences and ends with the preaching of doom.³ The Lucan John does not *preach* salvation, he warns people of the coming judgement unless they repent.

That John stands in the prophetic tradition, and is portrayed as such by Luke is evident from the fact that he is called just like a prophet, and that his preaching calls people to repentance in the light of God's coming judgement.

2 JOHN'S MESSAGE TO THE MULTITUDES

Scheffler's argument that Luke 3:7-9 is 'toned down' by Luke rests mainly on the introduction of δχλοις instead of the Pharisees and Sadducees in verse 7:

In Luke 3:7-9 Luke is relatively faithful in his transmission of the ‘preaching of doom’ of the Q-source (cf Mt 3:7-10), but in his context he interprets it as the introduction to the *Standespredigt*. For this reason he introduces the ‘multitudes’ in verse 7 (contra Q = Mt 3:7 which reads Pharisees and Sadducees) who again respond in verse 10. This does not mean that according to Luke the Pharisees and Sadducees are in principle excluded from salvation (cf Luke 15:31-32). Luke rather emphasises (versus Pharisaic and Sadducaic particularism) that salvation is not exclusively meant for these groups but for all (the δχλοις cf Fitzmyer 1981:467), especially also those whom the Pharisees and Sadducees excluded....The connection with the *Standespredigt* by means of the δχλοις therefore also has the implication that the Baptist's attack on nationalistic particularism in verse 8 is intensified. In the *Standespredigt* it emerges that toll-collectors can also, in the words of verse 8, be raised as children of Abraham and later in the Gospel Zacchaeus the toll-collector is explicitly called a 'son of Abraham' (19:9). *The close connection in the Lucan context between the Sondergut-tradition of the Standespredigt and the Q tradition on eschatological doom therefore has the result that the preaching of doom is actually turned against itself because of the new focus on the possibilities of salvation* (Scheffler 1990:23)

However, this argument presents certain serious difficulties:

(1) The fact that Luke substitutes Pharisees and Sadducees with multitudes in verse 7 (if it can be argued convincingly that Matthew 3:7 is closer to Q than

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Luke 3:7) does not mean that the message that is delivered also changes. The fact that the subject of verse 7 is changed, does not alter the message delivered in 3:7-9. The focus of 3:7 is definitely not salvation, unless of course one ignores the τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλοῦσης ὀργῆς. Instead, it stresses that the multitudes who came to be baptised were γεννήματα ἐχθρῶν. This saying has absolutely nothing to do with salvation, but everything with judgement. If Luke deliberately changed the Pharisees and Sadducees to the multitudes it does not stress the universality of salvation, but rather the fact that everybody is part of the 'generation of vipers' and needs to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. This is confirmed by the eschatological saying in 3:9 that shows that the moment of judgement is at hand. There is nothing either comforting or reassuring in 3:7-9 that can be regarded as the preaching of salvation.

(2) The fact that Scheffler interprets the use of the word multitudes in verse 7 in the light of the use of the same word in Luke 3:10-11 does not follow logically. Surely it must be done the other way round? (See also the discussion of: ‘The Standespredigt as an elaboration of what fruit of repentance involves’ below [par 3].)

(3) It is not certain that Matthew 3:7 contains the original version of Q, and that Luke changed it. Scheffler fails to show why he regards the version of Matthew to be identical with Q. He also does not state which reconstruction of Q he is referring to. It is noteworthy, however, that neither Polag (1979:28) nor Kloppenborg (1990:35) regards the reference to the Pharisees and Sadducees as original to Q. Kloppenborg has no preference for either Luke or Matthew's version, while Polag suggests that Luke might be closer to Q. Considering Matthew's polemic with the Jews, it follows that he might be responsible for the introduction of 'Pharisees and Sadducees' instead of the original 'multitudes'.

(4) It is also questionable whether Luke 3:7-9 can be regarded as only an introduction to the so-called Standespredigt of 3:10-14. The Standespredigt is an elaboration of καρποίς αἵματος τῆς μετανοίας. Luke uses it to show to his audience what kind of behaviour is proper for someone who claims to be repentant. The Standespredigt does not make sense independently, but only as an explanation of Luke 3:7-9. It is not the severity of Luke 3:7-9 that is 'toned down' by the Standespredigt, but rather the latter that indicates the harshness of the requirements for repentance!
3 THE STANDESPREDIGT AS AN ELABORATION OF WHAT FRUIT OF REPENTANCE INVOLVES

Luke introduces 3:10-14 as an answer to the question: 'What (good fruit) must we do in order to escape the coming judgement?' Scheffler justly remarks that this is a concretising of what καὶ τὸν ἀξία τῆς μετανοίας entails for each group in its situation: '...the answer given to the multitudes contains a general positive statement of what all people (therefore it is addressed to the δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις) should do in order to produce fruit in keeping with repentance...the toll-collectors are addressed with regard to their own specific situation and the καὶ τὸν ἀξία τῆς μετανοίας are for them even more concretised' (Scheffler 1990:27).

But if one sees it as a concretising of John's message, how is it possible that the Standespredigt 'tones down' the harshness of his message as Scheffler says concerning 3:10-11?

Luke wanted to communicate the saying on sharing (11bc) as a fruit of repentance, but because it is a saying that he thought to be generally applicable, he made the δὲ τοῖς John's addressees. He consequently had to introduce the δὲ τοῖς in 3:7 also (contra Mt which reads Pharisees and Sadducees). The result of this was that the judgement preaching is addressed to the δὲ τοῖς, but in the present context it is toned down because of the close linkage to 3:10-11 (Scheffler 1990:30).

Does Luke not—by indicating to each group what they are expected to do—confirm the severity of John's message rather than soften it? If 3:10-14 is a concretising of what the fruit of repentance is, then it cannot be that 3:10-11 also tones down the severity of the judgement preaching of John.

Scheffler remarks that the introduction of the toll-collectors and the soldiers shows Luke's social-ethical stance, because these groups were not of high standing, but despised by the Jews. 'Since Q does not spell out directly what the fruit of repentance is, Luke saw this as an opportunity to communicate his special socio-economical interest' (Scheffler 1990:30). This is of course correct. However, one cannot agree with his interpretation of 3:10-14 as a 'toning down' of the harshness of the Q material (3:7-9) because these groups constitute the universality of salvation:

The close connection in the Lucan context between the Sondergut-tradition of the Standespredigt and the Q tradition on eschatological doom therefore has the result that the preaching of doom is actually turned against itself because of the new focus on the possibilities of salvation (Scheffler 1990:23).

It has emerged that the incorporation of this tradition (i.e. the Standespredigt) changed
the tenor of the other traditions considerably.

However by means of redactional activity (cf verses 7, 10 and 15) Luke linked it (i.e. the Standespredigt) to its present context thereby giving the preaching of John a new meaning (Schemer 1990:25).

The Standespredigt, as far as content is concerned, ‘disturbs’ the severity of Q's preaching of judgement rather than toning in with it (Schemer 1990:28).

The fact that social outcasts reacted positively to John's message of judgement, does not alter the content of his message. Luke 3:7-9—although addressed to the multitudes—cannot be described or understood otherwise than judgemental preaching. The fact that Luke focuses on the positive reaction of the social outcasts of his day does not alter this message. The very fact that these people reacted at all was because of John's announcement of the impending doom.

It must be remembered that Luke first mentions that the multitudes asked what they were to do to escape judgement (Luke 3:10). Only then does he mention two socially undesirable groups that also reacted positively to John's message. Although the message was directed at all the people, Luke only identifies two groups of despised people as reacting appropriately to John's message. Although these two groups were despised by the people, they were nevertheless in powerful positions, and abused their power regularly to their own advantage.

In Luke 3:19-20 we have an example of someone even more powerful and equally despised, namely Herod, and a description of the way he reacted when he was rebuked in a similar fashion by John. He shows no regret, but instead locks John up in prison. This is in stark contrast to the multitudes, toll-collectors and soldiers who ask τι οὖν (καρπὸν καλὸν) ποιήσωμεν. The function of the Standespredigt is thus not to tone down the judgemental character of the Q material, but rather (1) to show the proper reaction to the Baptist's message and (2) which people reacted appropriately to his message—not for whom salvation was intended, but who responded to the message of judgement, and what John exhorted them to do. Because of this proper behaviour, the implication is that they will be saved from the coming judgement.⁴

It must be granted that the introduction of the toll-collectors and soldiers can be directly ascribed to Luke's universalism. By mentioning these two groups he shows that even despised persons can avoid the coming judgement. Yet John's

⁴ In Luke 19:1-9 one finds the story of Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus. He is a prime example of an outcast who was nevertheless ‘saved’ from judgement because he bore fruit of repentance. When Jesus announces that ‘today salvation has come to this household’ (Luke 3:9) he admits that Zacchaeus was under the judgement of God, but also that his appropriate actions will lead to his salvation.
answers to these groups also show Luke's concern for those who are at their mercy.

Thus the *Standespredigt* functions in three ways: It shows to Luke's audience the kind of action that constitutes repentance; it appeals to people of questionable social status to repent and thus shows that anyone who repents is acceptable in the Christian community.

Scheffler's arguments in this regard fail to convince, because he regards the *Standespredigt* as a reinterpretation of Q (Luke 3:7-9, 3:15-17) rather than an elaboration/explication of Luke 3:7-9. Luke 3:10-14 does not 'disturb the severity of Q's preaching of judgement' (Scheffler 1990:28), but rather explains it and concretises it. The *Standespredigt* is an answer to the question: 'What (good fruit) must we do (in order to escape the coming judgement)?'

4 WINNOWING AS METAPHOR OF THE COMING JUDGEMENT


He (Luke) achieves his purpose of focusing on salvation by means of a minor redaction of the latter verse. It reads as follows:

Luke 3:17
His winnowing fork is in his hand,
to clear his threshing floor,
and to gather his wheat
into his granary, but the chaff
he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 3:12
His winnowing fork is in his hand,
and he will clear his threshing floor
and [will] gather his wheat
into the granary, but the chaff
he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Luke's redaction consists only of changing two future tenses of Q into aorist infinitives (διακαθάρειν - διακαθάρατι; συνάξει - συναγαγεῖν). The result is that Jesus' positive salvation activity is pictured as something that will take place immediately. However, Luke leaves the word ἑταμαπαί in the future tense. Luke therefore des-eschatologise [sic] the positive salvation activity and creates a gap between God's merciful attitude towards men (= the present gathering of wheat) and the judgement (= the future burning of the chaff). What in Q refers to the eschatological day of judgement is by Luke reinterpreted to focus on the positive salvific aspect that takes place here and now (cf Schneider 1977:87).

It is interesting that Scheffler again assumes that the text of Matthew represents Q, and that Luke changed it. But this cannot be established convincingly enough as a basis for such a cardinal argument. Polag (1979:28) also considers Mat-
thew's version to represent Q. Kloppenborg (1990:36) on the other hand, regards Luke's version to be closer to Q. But let us assume for the moment (with Scheffler) that Matthew is closer to Q and that Luke changed the future tenses to aorist infinitives.

The fact that Luke changes the tense of Q from the future to aorist infinitives does not constitute a change in the time of the action of threshing and gathering. Since the aorist infinitives are dependent on the indicative (here βαπτίσει and κατακαύσει) for the temporal aspect, Luke's changes are superfluous. It cannot be established on these grounds that the salvific aspect of Christ's work is portrayed as taking place immediately, and the judgemental part later. Both the infinitives are so-called infinitives of purpose, showing what the coming one aims to do with the winnowing fork.

It is furthermore doubtful that one can interpret 3:17 by splitting it into a 'salvific' and 'judgemental' part. The saying as a whole suggests judgement and not salvation. Bovon (1989:177) remarks: 'Die Bilder von Baum und Kornfeld implizieren einen Bussruf und eine Drohung im Stil und in der Sprache der alttestamentlichen Prophetic.' The whole image of the winnowing fork, the threshing of the floor and the burning of the chaff shows a focus on judgement rather than salvation. This is confirmed by Old Testament texts such as Jeremiah 15:7; Isaiah 41:15-16 and Psalm 1:4 (Marshall 1978:148).

Finally, it must be noted that John's remarks about the coming one are a result of mistaken perceptions by the people regarding his identity. He rectifies these misconceptions by saying that the one that is coming is more powerful than he (ισχυρότερός μου).

He compares his baptism—which is a baptism of repentance in the light of impending judgement—with that of Jesus, and explains that Jesus' baptism will be εν πνεύματι αγίω και πυρί. If Jesus is described as 'more powerful' than John, and if He also baptises, it seems to follow that his baptism also happens in the light of the impending judgement. Thus the link between Jesus' baptism and the image of the winnowing fork in his hand confirms that the latter image is not to be considered an announcement of salvation.

5 Blass and Debrunner (1970:174) do not ascribe any temporal value to the infinitive. They furthermore state, in connection with the use of the infinitive in the New Testament, that: '...the inf. is used in Lk more frequently and in a wider context of constructions than in the other Gospels.' This ought to caution against reading too much into the change of a verb from the future indicative to aorist infinitive—if it indeed can be established that Luke did change the verbs. It might only be part of Luke's use of the language, and need not indicate any specific theological motive.
5 DID JOHN THE BAPTIST PREACH 'GOOD NEWS' IN LK 3:1-20?

Regarding 3:18, Scheffler (1990:24) remarks as follows:


It is obvious that παρακαλῶν as a present participle qualifies εὐηγγελίζετο. It cannot function alone, which is how it is apparently translated by quite a few Bible translations: 'And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them (Luke 3:18, NIV). This translation is faulty because it ignores the fact that παρακαλῶν does not function independently. It is an adverbial participle and as such it defines εὐηγγελίζομαι. This translation is probably because εὐαγγελίζομαι is usually translated by 'preaching the good news/gospel'. Rather than recognising that the focus in this instance was not on 'good news', the translators chose to translate the two verbs separately.

Scheffler opts for a similar understanding of παρακαλῶν εὐηγγελίζετο, and is therefore able to say that Luke’s aim was to show that John did not preach doom but good news. In his study on Mark, Marxsen (1969:143), following Harnack, contends that εὐαγγελίζομαι means ‘preach’ when used by Luke. This view is also shared by Strecker (1975:541-542): ‘Die vielfältige Bezeugung in Verbindung mit Engelbotschaft, Johannes dem Täufer, Jesus wie auch den Jüngern und den Aposteln zeigt, dass εὐαγγελίζομαι ein und denselben Inhalt nicht voraussetzt, sondern entsprechend der semitischen und griechischen Vorgeschichte des Wortes den unspezifizierten Sinn von ‘verkündigen besitzt.’ It seems that this opinion has not received the attention it deserves. A closer examination of some passages where Luke does use the term will show that this generic understanding of εὐαγγελίζομαι is in fact very probable.

* In Luke 16:16 εὐαγγελίζομαι is used in the passive form and has the kingdom of God as subject: 'Ο νόμος καί οἱ προφήται μέχρι Ἰωάννου ἀπὸ τότε ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται καὶ πᾶς εἷς αὐτῶν βιάζεται. It should be translated as follows: ‘From that time onwards the kingdom of God is preached and everybody forces his way into it.’ This has the implication that ‘the kingdom of God’ functions as the content of εὐαγγελίζομαι on a semantic level. In this regard the TEV, by trying to be consistent in translating it with ‘preach the good news’, translates as follows: ‘the Good News about the kingdom of God is being told.’ Since ‘the kingdom of God’ functions as the subject on a grammatical

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6 Other translations that follow a similar vein in translating this verse are the NEB, NAB and the GNB.
level and as the content/reference on a semantic level this rendering is forced. In this instance εὐαγγελίζομαι simply means to ‘preach/proclaim/tell’.

* Similarly, in Acts 15:35, it is impossible to translate εὐαγγελίζομαι with ‘preach the good news/gospel’. Acts 15:35 reads as follows: Παῦλος δὲ καὶ Βαρνάβας διέριψαν ἐν Ἀστιοχείᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελίζομενοι μετά καὶ ἐτέρων πολλῶν τῶν λόγων τοῦ κυρίου. Here τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου is given as the object of εὐαγγελίζομαι. It is interesting that neither the GNB, NAB, NEB, nor NIV translates εὐαγγελίζομαι with ‘good news’ in this instance, clearly recognising the fact that it can be understood generically as well. Although the verb is not in the passive here, it is used similarly to the way it is in Luke 16:16. The only difference is that τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου functions as the content of εὐαγγελίζομενοι in Acts 15:35, whereas ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ serves as the content of εὐαγγελίζεται in Luke 16:16. From these two examples it is obvious that εὐαγγελίζομαι can also be used to refer to preaching/proclamation without focusing on ‘good news’ as such.

But even if these examples do not suffice, the construction of Luke 3:18 still demands that we consider the possibility that εὐαγγελίζομαι is qualified by παρακάλων. It is useful to examine the corresponding speech of Peter in Acts 2:14-42. When Luke summarises Peter's speech—which is also an indictment of the Jewish people—the verb παρακάλει is used together with διεμαρτύρατο and the message is summarised as: ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation’ (Acts 2:40). Clearly the implication here is also to show the severity of the situation the people find themselves in. The summary follows after Peter has explained at length the position of Jesus—whom the Jews have crucified—as Lord and Christ and after they are urged to repent and be baptised in order to receive the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38. So we find in a similar speech in Acts—that is at the beginning of the book, at the beginning of a new ministry, and as part of a summary of a very disturbing sermon—that the verb παρακάλει is used in a context where people are warned of the severity of their position and their urgent need to repent in order to escape judgement (Acts 2:37-42). In Luke 3 the summary of John's speech also follows 3:7-9 and Luke 3:17 that both contain very harsh statements. Thus it follows logically that the summary of his speech would not contradict the message he delivered.

In the light of these remarks it is clear that John is not portrayed as preaching ‘good news’ in Luke 3:18 and that this summary is further evidence of the urgency with which he delivered his message that the people should produce fruit in keeping with repentance if they were to escape judgement. That Luke uses the verb εὐαγγελίζομαι in 3:18 is not sufficient ground to maintain that his message was ‘good’ news. This is true because the meaning of the verb as it is
used by Luke is not fixed, because it is qualified by παρακαλῶν, and because the context of 3:18 does not allow such an understanding of it. Of course there was a possibility of salvation, but that was only as a result of repentance. John also did not preach salvation, but rather judgement, and as a result people who repented received salvation. The problem with such an understanding of this message (as in the case of Scheffler) is that it undermines the cutting edge of the Baptist’s message. It becomes an unqualified announcement of unconditional salvation that is not supported by the text. John becomes an announcer of the wonderful news of salvation for all, despite their sinful lives. Thus it completely ignores the harshness of Luke 3:7-9,17.


Luke introduces the Standespredigt into his account of the ministry of John the Baptist to concretise what is meant by repentance and to show what kind of behaviour is proper for someone who claims to be repentant. He does not ‘tone down’ the harshness of the Baptist’s preaching, but concretises it by introducing first the multitudes and then the toll-collectors and soldiers. The examples he uses show to poor (multitudes) and powerful (soldiers and toll-collectors) alike the kind of behaviour that constitutes true repentance. It is noteworthy that Luke, despite his well-known concern for the poor, does not exclude the multitudes from the works of repentance.

Although it is significant that Luke uses the toll-collectors and soldiers in his examples, their introduction does not in any way change the severity of John’s preaching. They probably function as ‘incentive’ for people of similar standing in Luke’s audience to repent as well, and to demonstrate it by appropriate behaviour.

Luke portrays the Baptist as a prophet who preached the judgement of God. That is not to say that his preaching did not imply the possibility of ‘salvation’, but the main focus of his preaching (i.e. the two ‘sermons’ in Luke 3:7-9 and 3:15-17) was the coming judgement. The fact that John’s ministry is summarised as παρακαλῶν εὐηγγελίζετο, does not mean his message was one of comfort and salvation. There is nothing comforting in his message—which announces the eschatological judgement. Therefore John’s message to the people of the country around Jordan certainly cannot be described as good news!

WORKS CONSULTED

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