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JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE AS A PRECURSOR TO SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION (LK 3, 1-12)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines John the Baptist's message of repentance as a precursor to societal transformation. The approach has been qualitative as it paves way for an in-depth exploration of words, ideas and meaning. The historical-critical method and contextual tools are used in interpretation of the Biblical text. The study reveals that repentance is not only a condition for salvation but is also as mandatory as faith. Without repentance, man's other response to God lacks basic morality and sincerity.As a consequence of John's message of repentance, there should be even distribution and allocation of natural resources, healthy attitude of sharing one's possessions with others, respect and admiration one for another, as human lives and properties are preserved. Citizens would also imbibe the culture of serving God and man faithfully in their various walks of life. Finally, as people turn to God in genuine repentance and towards the life that God wants them to live, forgiveness of sins is assured, times of refreshment would come with the flourishing of the fruit of the Spirit made possible by the indwelling Spirit.

Keywords: John the Baptist, Repentance, Precursor, Righteousness, Social Transformation.

Introduction

Luke's Gospel is the first of two books addressed to a man named Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). The author is not identified by name in either book, but the unanimous testimony of early Christians and corroborating internal evidence of the two books point to common authorship by Luke. Luke wrote this Gospel to the Gentiles to provide a full and accurate account record "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up" (acts 1:1-2a). Luke's Gospel begins with the most complete infancy narratives (Lk1:5-2:40) and gives the only glimpse in the Gospels of Jesus' boyhood (Lk 2:41-52). After describing John the Baptist's ministry and giving Jesus' genealogy, he divides Jesus' ministry into three major sections: (a) His ministry in and around Galilee (Lk4:14- 9:50), (b) His ministry during the final

journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51- 19:27), and his last week in Jerusalem (Lk 19:29- 24:43)). However, this article concentrates on the ministry of John the Baptist in Luke 3:1-12.

In this pericope of the Scripture, Luke 3: 1-12, Luke tells of the preaching of John the Baptist. His message was a message of the axe laid to the root of the tree, of the terrible sifting and of the consuming fire. It was a message of terror. Whatever the message of John was, it was not good news. It was not agospel. What then is the gospel?

For Stott (1998) "the gospel is Christ crucified, that is, His finished work on the cross. And to preach the gospel publicly is to portray Christ as crucified" p.74). In other words, the gospel is not a message of "the preparation of the way of the Lord and of making straight part for him" (Matt. 3:3). It is not just a general introduction about the Jesus of history, but a specific proclamation of Jesus as crucified. It is not even some pieces of good advice to men, but good news about Christ. It is not an invitation to do anything but a declaration of what God has done. Indeed, it is not a demand but an offer. The gospel offers justification and gift of the Spirit. It is with these two gifts that God blesses all who are in Christ (Stott, 1988). Of what value then is John's message of repentance?

This is, by no means, not to underrate John's message of repentance. John the Baptist himself was no mean preacher. He was one of the world's supremely effective preachers. It is clear that John preached for action and produced it. The Great Head of the Church commended him as the burning light (Jn. 5:35). Jesus also regarded him as the last and greatest member of apostolic succession (Lk. 16:16). However, Turner (2008) argued that although John was the apex of the old order of promise yet, those who participated in the new order of fulfilment in the kingdom of heaven were greater than he. Bruner (2004) brought out the reason concisely when he said, "John's magnificent ministry cannot remove our own problem (sin) or impart our main resource (the Spirit)" (p. 86).

Irrespective of the view one may hold for John's message, at least he had the commendation of the Head of the Church: "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). Scarcely only few preachers produced such effects as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. His message of repentance may not be good news. His message may be seen as a message of judgment or of terror. At best, his message may be seen as a social gospel. His message produced a kind of electric and magnetic effect upon his audience that they came asking him, "What should we do then?" (Lk. 3:10). The social, political and economic milieu in which John lived and ministered among his people can be compared with the contemporary Nigerian situation. This article therefore attempts to show that John the Baptist's message of repentance may have some pitfalls but it is good enough to be the precursor of societal transformation.It is qualitative or analytical in approach. The historical-critical method and contextual tools are used in the interpretation of the Biblical text.

Exegesis and Discussion

In all John's preaching, one could decipher at least two ethical demands of his message:*metanoeo*(repent) and*poiesate oun karpous axious tes metanoias*(bring therefore fruits worthy of repentance).The first call was a call to repent(*metanoeite*). The second call, which of course is its antecedent is*poiesate oun karpous axious tes metanoias* (bring therefore fruits worthy

of repentance). The verb*metanoeo* (repent) is often explained etymologically as a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways. It is not just merely a feeling sorry or changing one's mind but as a turning round, a complete alteration of the basic motivation and direction of one's life.Matthew used *metanoeo* (repent) intentionally in Matthew 3: 2. For Bonnard (1970), it is more likely that it was a general term that revealed little chronologically but insisted that the account was historical. The name "John" had been a popular name among the Jews then. Four or five "Johns" are mentioned in the New Testament. The description of John here as*Ioannen ton Zazhariou huion* (John the son of Zacharias) or as*ho Baptistes*(the Baptist) in Matthew 3: 1 was partly; to distinguish him from other Johns and partly because baptism was so prominent in his ministry. Proclamation characterized his arrival. Although he was known as "the Baptizer", he arrived "preaching" (*kerusson*). John began his ministry*en te eremo* (in the desert) of Judea"Desert" had long had prophetic connotation (the Law was given in the "wilderness"); and the Zealots used the desert as a hiding place (cf. Mtt.24: 26; Acts21: 38).He also lived in the desert. The face of desert was covered with dry stubble and brushwood. Occasionally, a spark sets the face of the desert ablaze and from their clefts came the vipers, scurrying in terror from the menacing flames. When John said,*Gennemata echidnon* (You brood of vipers) it was to them that he likened the people who came to be baptized.

In *Matthew* 3: 2, Matthew gave us the second aspect of John's call to repentance which was*eggiken gar he basileia ton ouranon*(for the kingdom of heaven is coming), and this is given as the ground for repentance. Keener (2009) posited that the gospellers never perceived repentance to mean the "change of mind" as earlier etymological interpreters sometimes supposed, but the biblical concept of "turning" or "returning" to God. Repentance occupied a central position to all religious faith and to all relationship with God in the life of the Jewish people. More (cited by Barclay, 2009) said that: "Repentance is the sole, but inexorable, condition of God's forgiveness and the restoration of his favour and the divine forgiveness and favour are never refused to genuine repentance" (p. 60). He went on to say that God fully and freely remits the sins of the penitent is a cardinal doctrine of Judaism. The Jewish word commonly used for repentance is the word *teshubah* which is the noun for the verb *shub*, which means to turn. In other words, repentance is a turning away from evil and a turning towards God. Repeatedly, the Bible speaks of this turning away from sin and this turning towards God. Ezekiel had it: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33: 11). Jeremiah had it: "You discipline me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return because you are the Lord my God" (Jer. 31: 18). Hosea had it: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God…take word with you and return to the Lord" (Hos. 14: 1-2). From all these, it is quite clear that in Judaism repentance is a turning from evil to God, with a corresponding change in action. John was fully within the tradition of his people when he demanded that his audience should bring forth fruit suitable for repentance.

The demand for repentance is based on God's eschatological rulein Matthew 3: 2 - *eggiken gar he basileia ton ouranon*. It is very much likely that*he basileia ton ouranon*(the kingdom of heaven) in this context means much the same as "the kingdom of God" in other Gospels and that it is a Jewish expression with the word "God" avoided out of genuine motives of reverence. For

Morris (1992), Matthew's use of the expression is equally a suggestive of the fact that the kingdom extends beyond the earth and that the Son has a part in it as well as the Father. The perfect tense verb*eggiken*expresses the urgency of the demand for repentance. God's rule has drawn near in redemptive history; it is about to happen. Given that the same message is preached by John, Jesus and the disciples (Matt.3:2; 4: 17; 10: 7), fixed geographical considerations of the kingdom is overruled. It is most probable that John never conceived of the kingdom as a tangible realm but rather as a dynamic, life-transforming reign. This is not to deny the historical progression in the manifestation of this reign for as a moral motivation it has already arrived. Turner (2008) posited that*eggiken*seen in this perspective does not differ a great deal from *ephthasen*(has come) in Matthew12: 28 given that the presence of the kingdom as God's dynamic for moral change does not in any way contradict its use elsewhere as the future earthly rule or domain of Jesus. In other words, Jesus' kingdom is both present and future, now and not yet.

The demand for repentance necessitates the production of fruits in commensurate with repentance. Genuine repentance will be accompanied by fruits of righteousness (cf. Mat. 23: 23; Lk. 3: 10- 14; Acts 26: 20). True saving faith and conversion must become evident through lives that forsake sin and bear godly fruit (Jn. 15: 16). For John, those who say they believe in Christ and are the children of God, and yet do not live lives that produce good fruit, are like trees that will cut down and thrown into the fire. He paints a picture of judgment when he said, *ede de kai he axine pros ten rhizan ton dendron keitai*(and now the also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees). However, this impending judgment would be met with confidence by those who had discharged their duty to their neighbor and who had faithfully done their day's work.

In Jewish thoughts, repentance lasts as long as life lasts giving that the gates of repentance are never closed. The true penitent is he who has the opportunity to do the same sin again, in the same circumstances, and who does not do it. Jewish teachers taught that if Israel could repent perfectly for even one day, the Messiah would come. It therefore stands to reason that it was only the hardness of human hearts which delayed the sending of God's Redeemer into the world. Besides, repentance was the very centre of the Jewish faith as it is the very centre of the Christian faith, for repentance is the turning away from sin and the turning towards God, and towards the life that God means us to live. The message of John therefore, may not be gospel *per se*, in the real sense of it, but it is good enough to be the precursor of righteousness and transformation.

Characteristics of his Message

First, John had true sense of his call and mission. In an ancient Israel, when a king proposed to tour a part of his dominions in the region, he sent a courier before him to tell the people to prepare the roads. So John was regarded as the courier of the king. It was John's conviction that he was only the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He livedby it and was guided by it. He was contented to serve in that capacity. However, the preparation on which he insisted was a preparation of heart and life. It appears that John was telling them, "The King is coming, mend not your roads, but your lives". The onus of responsibility lies on every one to make life fit for the King to see.

Second, John presented a message of judgment to his hearers. Far from being a good news, it was news of terror instead. The Jews prided themselves as God's favourites. They were deluded in that chosen-nation clause as the "Children of Abraham". Consequently, they believed that God would judge other nations with one standard but the Jews with another. John told them that The King was still to come and with him would come judgment. The winnowing fan was a great flat wooden shovel; with it the grain was tossed into the air, the heavy grain fell to the ground and the chaff was blown away. And just as the chaff was separated from the grain, so the King would separate the good and bad. Hence, John made it plain to them that they would not be exempted from judgment and that racial privilege is of no use, just as life and not ancestral lineage was God's standard of judgment.

Third, he summoned men and women to repentance. John not only rebuked the king and the subjects for what they had done, he invited and challenged them to what they ought to do. He not only condemned them for what they were- hypocrites, he challenged them to what they should do-genuine repentance that results in godly lifestyle. He was like a light illuminating the paths, and like a voice calling people to turn from their evil walks in the dark and follow the illumined paths and walk in righteousness. In other words, John not only condemned evil but also exhorted them to the noble deeds of righteousness. He condemned them for being sinners at the same time challenged them to turn from their sins and turn to God.

Fourth, in dealing with sin, John called a spade a spade.He boldly rebuked sin without minding whose horse is gored. If King Herod sinned by contracting an unlawful marriage, John rebuked him. If the Sadducees and Pharisees, the Church leaders of his day, were floundering in ritualistic formalism, he denounced them. If the commoners were leading their life unmindful of God, he never hesitated to tell them to their face. John gallantly denounced sin wherever he found it, be it in the home, crowd, Church or state. In dealing with sin, he called a spade a spade. He never knew how to dress up mutton to look like a lamb. He spoke plainly about sin. It is clear that the he preached for action and produced it. Barclay (2009) shared this opinion when he said, "It is clear that John preached for action and produced it. He did not deal in theological subtleties but in life" (p. 42).

Fifth, his message originated from God. John came from God. He came out of the wilderness. He started his ministry after years of separation and lonely preparation by God. He appeared before his people not with an opinion and philosophy of his own, but with inspired messages from God. For a long time before his voice was heard, he had tarried in the presence of God. He heard from God that he might speak to men. For Barclay (2009), "The preacher, the teacher with the prophetic voice must always come into the presence of others out of the presence of God" (p.52).

Sixth, he directed people to Christ. It was the Jewish belief that Elijah would return before the Messiah would showcase Himself, and that he would be the forerunner of the coming King. That belief was so intense among the Jews. John came to fulfil that role. He came not to announce himself but the arrival of the Messiah. He came to point people to Christ. John knew he was not the story. He knew he was not age-long awaited answer. His ministry was like

gospel in the bud. He knew he must decrease in order that the One coming after him to increase. He pointed people beyond himself to Christ. He obliterated himself in his message.

Seventh, his message has the import of a social gospel. It was John's conviction that people should share their possessions one with another. For John, God would not tolerate anyone who is inclined to have too much while others are in lack.

Eight, for John, people had a duty to serve God in their various walks of life. It was John's conviction that people were not to abandon their jobs but to faithfully serve God in their duty posts. Let the tax-collector be a good tax-collector; let the soldier be a good soldier. People were obligatorily bound to serve God wherever God had positioned them. They had to do this with the fullest realization that it was expected of the stewards to be faithful.

The Relevance of John's Message to Societal Transformation

It is an open secret that Nigeria is an enabling environment for the thriving of all manner of social issues. A social issue is a problem that influences many citizens within a society. It is a common problem in present-day society and one that many people strive to solve. It is often the consequence of factors extending beyond the individual's control. A social problem ranges from poverty, peer pressure, homelessness, pollution, gangs, crime, drug/alcohol abuse, rioting, natural disaster, bullying, racism, terrorism, unemployment, poor education, ill health, violence, hunger, rape, kidnapping, fraud et cetera. For instance, Abogunrin (1986) describes Nigeria as a nation which "is rich naturally but majority of her citizens are poor materially" (p. 11). He went on to say that poverty is not only material for Nigeria that, it is not only poor morally and spiritually, but also bankrupt both morally and spiritually. In his own contributions, Malomo (1986) sees Nigeria as a "largely demoralized, confused and unwise nation, consisting of mostly ignorant, uneducated, bewildered citizens who have lost faith and hope in any efforts or organizations" (p.23). He equally added that Nigerians are addicted to irresponsibility and suicidal selfishness. However, it is the contention of the authors that nobody can adequately describe the condition of this country called Nigeria, or enumerate all the problems confronting it. It is obvious that there is no aspect of our national life, be it political, economic, social, religious, judicial- which is not bedeviled by social issues. This, therefore, spells the yearning need for societal transformation.

What then should be done? This appears not to be an easy question. The spiritual remedy must be found before lasting moral solution. One thing is certain: the great difficulties of the present demand equally great sacrifices. "Righteousness" says the Bible "exalts the nation, but sin is a reproach to people" (Pv. 13:24 RSV). If our nation and our people are righteous, not just religious, and true to God, then we shall be on the right track to societal transformation. How can we be true to God? It is by taking the first necessary step towards God, and that is through repentance as depicted in John's message.

The necessity of repentance as a precursor to righteousness and transformation is revealed in the proclamation of both John the Baptist and Jesus as it opened in the command to repent (Matt. 3:2; 4: 17), and, as against the prosperity message of many Nigerian ministers of the gospel. Repentance includes both a confession of sins (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1: 5) and purpose of amendment (Lk. 3:4-14). This implies a new commitment to God. For Chamberlain (1960) it

simply means, "I accept the will of God, instead of my own, as regnant in my life" (p.141). References to such a spirit of change, penitence and surrender permeate the Gospel records even where the word is not used (cf. Matt.5:3-6; 16:24; 18:3-9; 19:21; Lk. 18:9-24). True repentance issues in obedience; it does not start and end in words (Matt. 21:28-32), just as the message of the gospel of wealth that only appeals to emotions and the lust for wealth. Purkiser, Taylor and Taylor (1977) remarked that repentance is not only a condition of salvation it is also as mandatory as faith. They are also right when they see repentance as man's response to God's overtures and without which any other response lacks basic morality and sincerity.

The Epistles are also unanimous in their assumption that repentance is essential to any sound conversion, righteousness and transformation, and is equally demanded if sin recurs after conversion. Since they are letters to Christians, naturally the initial command to repent would not be in the foreground; but the insistence that there must be repentance for post-conversion sin is clear enough. Even in Romans where Paul's polemic is against a works-justification and where he most vigorously affirms *sola fide* (cf. Rom. 3:27-28; 4:1-5), he will not permit an antinomian misunderstanding (Rom. 6:2). It is the "unrepentant" heart which stores up wrath for itself (Rom. 2:5).

Though the man in Corinth guilty of immorality (1 Cor. 5:1) may have been truly converted at some time, he is now called a "wicked person" who is to be removed from their fellowship (1 Cor. 5:13). Dual repentance is called for. Those involved, especially those who sanctioned this evil deed, must repent of their arrogance in the face of this deplorable situation (they should have "mourned," 1 Cor. 5:2), and demonstrated repentance by prompt discipline; the culprit also must be brought to repentance. To effect this, Paul delivers the man "to Satan for the destruction of his *sarx*(flesh), that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord"(1 Cor. 5:5).

That Paul defines repentance as including amendment and likewise as essential to salvation is confirmed by reference in his second Corinthian letter to another occasion of offense (2 Cor. 7:8-12). The "sorrow" which belongs to true repentance can be distinguished from "the sorrow of the world." The first sorrow "produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret". "For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you…what indignation, what alarm…what zeal, what punishment!" (2 Cor. 7:11). Similar and equally thorough repentance of the offender is implied in 2 Corinthians 7:5-11 of the same letter. This therefore reveals that there is a vast difference between the remorse of Judas (*metemelethe*), the regret of worldlings (*metamelomai*), and the repentance unto salvation (*metanoian*), which is a change of mind and life. In other words, for societal transformation in Nigeria to be what it should really be, the citizens are hereby summoned not to a mere remorse, not to the simple regret of the worldlings, but to repentance that leads to salvation.

It may be reasonable to say, however, that not until sin has smitten one and left one with bruises that one will admit one's need of righteousness and transformation. It is not until one is arrested, condemned and killed by sin that one can call upon Christ for justification and life.

It makes sense to say that not until sin has driven one to despair of oneself that one will ever believe in Jesus. It is certainly not until sin has humbled one even to hell that one can turn to the gospel to raise one to heaven. This is exactly what social ills have done to Nigerian society. It is in this wise that John's message of repentance serves as a precursor to righteousness and transformation in Nigeria.

When we consider that the resultant effect of a repentant soul under God is to glorify Christ; to show Him reproduced and expressed through us; it will appear how totally impossible is the challenge apart from the enabling power of the Spirit. Tens of thousands have struggled in feeble and futile effort to be Christ-like, yet without knowing the power of the Spirit to reproduce the Christ-life within them. The power of which we speak is not primarily to work miracles or create great sensations as to our ability. It is rather power to go on when going is hard; to stick to our assignments when others think we are fools and failures; to live holy lives when the atmosphere around us is foul with sin; to believe God when the evidence appears contrary; to preach the Word when men reject it; to stay with the minority that is right when more and more are switching to the easy way that is wrong; to endure to the end, triumph over every adversity, and enter into His glory. Every Nigerian citizen therefore needs not only repentance but the enabling power of the Holy Spirit who is the power behind this repentance and societal transformation. What then shall we repent of? Amongst other things, Mala (1986) captures it very well when said:

- *of sins of ingratitude of God for His blessings;*
- *of our ego, which sees self as more important than the other fellow;*
- *of the worship of money, making it the essence of life, and allowing it to dictate the tune of our national behavior; of making money the yardstick for respect and importance in the society;*
- *of looting of the national treasury by privileged few who deliberately siphon Nigerian naira overseas;*
- *of waste of funds by top civil servants and collaborating contractors;*
- *of display of wealth in the form of big cars, expensive dresses and lavish parties;*
- *of cultural enslavement as reflected in sensual dances like the maiden dance, during which the body is exposed in public;*
- *of avenging the wrong done to us by government and employers;*
- *of sin, bribery and corruption; and*
- *of not being true to oaths of offices* (p. 194).

In John's message of repentance, we saw a need to repent and invite Jesus to be the Saviour and Lord of our lives. Such an invitation with deep sense of humility will spiritually awaken us and enable to open us up to the power and activities of His Spirit.

Unlike John's message of repentance, the gospel message that more often flows from the pulpit down to the pews in the Church Cathedrals in Nigeria is thegospel of wealth otherwise known as prosperity gospel. Horton (1990) observes that the prosperity gospel is modern gospel that is marketed to consumers and not proclaimed to penitent sinners. In other words, prosperity preachers are gospel merchants who peddle the Word of God for money and not for conversion of souls. They are money-driven ministers who take advantage of their listeners to enrich themselves. They not only exploit rather than liberate people but also seek

to enrich Church ministers at the expense of their Church members. As Ukah (1997) rightly observes, the prosperity preachers "employ marketing drives and strategies in the range of their advertisements in both print and electronic media to sell their wares and products" (p. 128) and thereby, subjugating their listeners to unguarded bombard of subterfuge and naivety. Such messages aid and abet societal issues instead of assisting to curb it. This is one of the reasons while the gospel of repentance by John is germane both to the ministers of God in Nigeria and their parishioners for the inauguration of societal transformation and righteousness.

Given that that there have been moral failures in the country because there are moral failures at home and in the Church, the Christian Church would be expected to reflect spiritual transformation and vitality and be true, dynamic and restore its lost glory if it must remain the voice of the voiceless and serve as a major social agent to societal transformation and righteousness in Nigeria. Like John, the Church should summon men and women to repentance. Like John, the Church ministers should rebuke sin wherever it is found be it in the homes, in the schools, the government and in the society at large. Like John, the Church should serve as a light illuminating the paths, and like voice calling people to turn from their evil walks in the dark and follow the illumined paths and walk in righteousness.

More so, Nigeria is a class society where there is an apparent divides between the rich and the poor or between "the haves" and "the have-not"; hence, the aphorism, "the rich is getting richer, and the poor, poorer". The economy of the nation appears to be in the hands of few privileged individuals who at one time or the other saw themselves in the corridors of power. Leadership positions are no longer seen as means of sacrificial services but as a means of looting and amassing public funds. Every avenue is turned into money making venture, extortion and exploitation at the expense of the poor masses. The situation appears to be worse in the Church cathedrals that supposed to be the voice of the people.For John, this is an error, a serious deviation from normal. It was his serious conviction that people should share their possessions one with another. It is the contention of John that God would not tolerate anyone who is inclined to have too much while others are in lack. This should be the crying need for all Nigerians. So, as a consequence of John's message there should be an even distribution and allocation of natural resources. Instead of commercialization of education, education should be the privilege and pride of every Nigerian child. Instead of rape, terrorism and unwanted destruction of life and property, there would be respect and admiration one for another as human lives and properties are preserved.

For societal transformation to be possible, it must be anchored upon the foundation stone of true repentance resulting from the deep proper heart searching and a willingness to accord God due honour and to show love and respect to fellow men. All agencies of moral transformation including the family, the school and the Church must be involved. That iswhy John advocated that every citizen had a duty to serve God in their various walks of life. For him, people should not give up on their jobs but to serve God faithfully through those jobs. According to him, tax collectors, soldiers and in fact, all the civil and public servants are obligatorily bound to serve God wherever God has positioned them. When this is achieved, it

is expected that our society will be transformed into a better place as the quality of life it transmits to posterity will be ennobling, enviable and sustaining,

Conclusion

John's ministry can neither remove our own problem (sin) nor impart our main resource (the Spirit). His message of repentance cannot save, only Jesus can. His message is not a gospel. Be that as it may, together with faith, repentance is a condition and mandatory for salvation. His message serves to uncover humans' disreputation and reduce humans to mere sinful and rebellious creatures, just under the judgment of God. For it is not until sin has humbled one even to hell that one can turn to the gospel to raise one to heaven.

John's message draws one to respond to God's overtures and without which any other response lacks basic morality and sincerity. Repentance is considered as the foundation, the starting point and the knife-edge upon which transformation and righteousness rest. It is an error to say that one is righteous and with a transformed lifestyle without having the initial experience of repentance. Indeed, it is the precursor of righteousness and transformation.

The demand for repentance necessitates the production of fruits of righteousness. As a consequence of John's message, if our people are righteous and not just religious and be true to God, we shall be on the right track to societal transformation. This is because true repentance issues not only in confessions of sins, amendment of life but also in obedience and new commitment to God.

Resulting from John's message and for societal transformation in Nigeria to be what it should, the citizens are summoned not to a mere remorse, not to the simple regret of the worldlings but to repentance that leads to salvation. Hence, the cryingneeds to invite Jesus to be the Saviour and Lord of our lives. Such an invitation with deep sense of humility and commitment will spiritually awaken us and enable to open us to the power and activities of the Holy Spirit. The Christian Church is then expected to reflect spiritual transformation and vitality and be true, dynamic and restore its lost glory if it must remain the major social agent for societal transformation.

As a consequence of John's message of repentance, there should be even distribution and allocation of natural resources, healthy attitude of sharing one's possessions with others, respect and admiration one for another, as human lives and properties are preserved. Citizens would also imbibe the culture of serving God and man faithfully in their various walks of life. Indeed, the application and integration of John's message of repentance to Nigeria situation would help to transform the society to a better place and ensure that the quality of life it transmits to posterity would be enviable, fulfilling and ennobling.

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