

A Study in Luke

Week Six

Luke 3:1-38

Day One

3:1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar-when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene- 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

vs. 1&2 – You cannot apply to be a servant of God to fill the role of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. You cannot go to college and then look for a position. A. W. Tozer wrote in *God Tells the Man Who Cares*:

The true minister is not one by his own choice but by the sovereign commission of God. From a study of the Scriptures one might conclude that the man God calls seldom or never surrenders to the call without considerable reluctance. The young man who rushes too eagerly into the pulpit at first glance seems to be unusually spiritual, but he may in fact only be revealing his lack of understanding of the sacred nature of the ministry. The old rule, “Don’t preach if you can get out of it,” if correctly understood, is still a good one. The call of God comes with an insistence that will not be denied and can scarcely be resisted.

Even though John’s birth was surrounded with prophecy concerning his ministry, he could not begin until “the word of the Lord came to John.” That meant that John was in the desert waiting on God until his time had come. What was he doing? I would imagine fulfilling the promise found in Isaiah:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:27-31).

Are you waiting on the Lord? Then use this time wisely, for when the call comes, you won’t have time to get ready. Now is the time to do that, for the promise of God concerning you will be fulfilled.

v. 3 – Now we see why John had to wait—he received a unique word from the Lord to preach a baptism of repentance. Up to this point, being part of the family of God was by

ethnicity; if you were a Jew, you were in. But now the criteria were changing and trusting in your genealogy no longer qualified you to be part of the covenant community. From this point, repentance from sin and a break with your past as evidenced by baptism were required.

Day Two

4 As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"

v. 4 – It is my opinion that everyone has a Bible verse or passage that relates to his or her life's purpose. My verse is in Genesis 1:2, which helps describe my purpose to "bring order out of chaos." Here is a reference to Isaiah 40:3-4, which summarizes John's mission statement perfectly. John came to prepare the way for Jesus, to sensitize the people to the spiritual message that was coming. Do you have a Bible passage that is special to you? Not one that helped you through a tough time, but one that describes who you are and what you do best? If not, be looking for one, for you may have it and just don't know it.

v. 5 – It was customary for a king or dignitary to have someone ride ahead of his entourage to clear the road and make it passable so the dignitary's transport would not have to stop to clear the road itself. If John were an American football player, he would have been a blocker for Jesus, preparing the hearts of the people for Jesus message to "run through" them. This verse from Isaiah spoke to the deep work that John did—to make mountains low and fill in valleys would be a lot of heavy work in the natural. This symbolizes the deep and serious spiritual work that John was sent to do.

v. 6 – What Jesus did, He did for all the world to see. He said:

But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea (Luke 4:43-44).

He also said:

"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." (Mark 14:48-50).

Jesus had a purpose and a strategy to complete it. Do you? Are you reaching the world, or as much of it as God wants you to reach, with your purpose message?

Day Three

7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

v. 7 – The crowds came out to John. That is a miracle and a testimony to the power of purpose. John did not have to look for the crowds; they came looking for him. Keep in mind that John wasn't living in a city; he was in the desert. When I help people clarify their purpose, I ask them what regularly happens to them that they don't have to go seek. What group seeks them out for help? What situation do they always find themselves in? That is the power of purpose—God wants you to fulfill your purpose more than you do and brings the opportunities to you.

It appears that John didn't mince words as he prepared the way. Calling a group a bunch of snakes isn't the way to win friends and influence people. Matthew is more specific about who this group of snakes was:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Matthew 3:7-8).

Jesus' coming didn't only represent mercy and grace; it also represented wrath and judgment to those who would reject His message. The Pharisees came to "check out" John's message, not to submit to his teachings. And John pounced on them, singling them out for specific criticism.

v. 8 – The Jews relied on their genealogy and the fact that they were Jews. They felt that connected them to God in a special way, thus lessening their need for righteousness, holiness and humility. John addressed this right away, saying that from now on, being a Jew meant nothing if that Jew did not receive God's righteousness, namely Jesus Christ. We see that Paul was still delivering this message in his epistles.

John said that anyone who came to God needed the fruit with repentance and not reliance on ethnic origins.

v. 9 – God was not interested in a healthy tree, but God fruit. Jesus alluded to this as well:

Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree

withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked (Matthew 21:18-20).

No longer would God tolerate a good-looking person, a Law-abiding Jew, who did not bear fruit. The axe was already at the root of that deception and the tree would be completely chopped down by the end of Jesus' ministry.

Are you leafy and green, not smoking or doing naughty things? But the real question is: Are you bearing fruit? When Jesus comes to examine your tree, what does He find?

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:21-25).

Day Four

10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. 11 John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." 12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" 13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely-be content with your pay."

v. 10 – The crowd wanted some practical examples of what they should do to bear fruit consistent with repentance. Talk is cheap and spiritual commitments often can be made with great emotion, but little follow up. When I teach, I am always trying to help the listener apply what they are hearing (I am not always successful). Did you ever notice how most of Paul's epistles are divided in two? The first half is teaching and theology; the second half is devoted to life applications. We would do well to emulate that pattern as teachers and disciples.

v. 11 – John started out with simple principles on how to share. You can only wear one suit at a time, so if you have two and someone else has none, you should give away the one you have. What is the condition of your closet right now? Bulging with clothes that you don't wear anymore? Why are you holding onto them? Give them away. My rule-of-thumb is that if I haven't worn something for a year, I probably won't wear it again. It's time to give it away. Maybe you need to give something away out of your closet today.

vs. 12&13 – John then gave instructions for the workplace. It is of note that tax collectors came to be baptized. They were a hated group in Israel, for they collected

taxes for the Roman government. Often they collected much more than was just to enrich themselves at the people's expense. Did you know that the Pharisees would not accept alms money from a tax collector? That was dirty money to the Pharisees. When Jesus was criticized for the company He kept, it was said that He hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes. But here are the tax collectors showing up and asking John questions about what to do after they were baptized. John did not tell them to quit their jobs; he told them to be fair and honest.

v. 14 – Then John addressed the soldiers, who had to be Romans. We see all the signs that the Lord was extending His mercy to Gentiles, but of course we have the hindsight of history. The Jews could not see it like this and the Gentiles eventually became a stumbling block to Jews coming to Christ. At any rate, soldiers then used their power to “shake down” the people for money, falsely accusing them of wrongs and then accepting bribes to dismiss the charges. Notice that John did not condemn Rome or the soldiers; he simply urged them to be ethical in their behavior.

A walk with God is not that complicated; difficult maybe, but not complicated. We have made it more difficult at times than it really is. When my wife was growing up, she would ask her mother what she wanted for her birthday or Christmas. Her mother would say, “Just be a good girl.” What does God want from you? He wants you to be a good boy or girl and you know how to do that.

Day Five

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 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." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

v. 15 – This was a temptation for John to think of himself more highly than he ought to have. It is important to know your purpose and who you are; it is also important to know who you are *not*. It is fascinating to read how expectant the Jews were. They had hope for a Messiah whom they had been expecting for centuries. But the hope had been kept alive through the teaching of the rabbis and the reading of Scripture. What hope! What consistency! I have trouble waiting on God's promises for 10 years and these people were waiting eagerly and excitedly from generation to generation.

vs. 16&17 – John knew his purpose was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah, so he deflected the people's expectations clearly and confidently. John was powerful in what he did, but One was coming who was more powerful than John. John dealt with outward rituals like baptism, but the One coming would deal with internal issues.

I am more and more intrigued with the image of fire in our relationship with the Lord. Fire is destructive and painful when it comes in contact with our flesh. And that is how the fire of God can be. It burns away our impurities and it can hurt. We must not be surprised when the fire comes:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Peter 4:12-14 NASU).

And we must know what to do because the fire of God is an ever-present possibility:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Are you in a fiery time? Is God burning away something in your life that is inconsistent in your walk with Him? If so, don't fight it. Submit to the dealings of God in this season and He will bring you through. Remember, He is working to conform you to the image of Christ and that requires some major renovations at times. But don't worry; this won't last any longer than it takes to remove the problem and replace it with the Holy Spirit solution. So be encouraged.

v. 18 – Obviously John spent much of his time teaching the people. Baptism was probably something he did for people who responded to his teaching. Let me repeat: As teachers, we must work to give people a chance to apply what we are teaching. Teaching that isn't connected to the practicalities of life can lead to heady knowledge of God that doesn't translate into action.

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check (James 3:1-2).

If you are a teacher of truth, what are you doing to help people apply that truth? If you are not a teacher, then don't try to be one unless God has called you to be.

Day Six

19 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, 20 Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. 21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

vs. 19&20 – Luke the historian jumped ahead of what he was describing to tell us about John’s encounter with Herod that would cost him his head. This Herod was Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great who was king when Jesus was born. Now his son was ruling roughly one-fourth of his father’s lands.

The infamous Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus and Berenice, and granddaughter of Herod the Great. Her first marriage was with Herod Philip, her uncle. She eventually left her husband, Herod Philip, and lived publicly with Herod Antipas, her brother-in-law, who had been before married to the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia Petraea.

John’s prophetic ministry publicly addressed this immoral union and Herod’s wickedness. It is interesting that when Jesus appeared before Herod, Jesus said not a word. This encounter with John the Baptist was the last time the Lord would reach out to Herod for repentance. It is a frightening thing when God doesn’t speak to a man anymore. That was about to happen to Herod.

vs. 21&22 – This passage would seem to hold some measure of proof for the existence of the Trinity. Jesus was present in bodily form, the Holy Spirit was also present “in bodily form” and the Father spoke from heaven. The Trinity is a difficult doctrine to explain. Islam holds Christians to be polytheists because they interpret this to mean there are three Gods. I had a Catholic explain to me once that the Trinity is like a blanket folded in three—each fold is a part of the other, but each one represents a distinct part of the whole. Yet if you were to cut off any part at the fold, you would still have a blanket. It’s not a perfect explanation, but it has always helped me.

Jesus had not performed any public ministry to date, yet the Father spoke from heaven and declared that He was well pleased with Him. God’s love for us is never tied to what we do, but who we are. We are His children through Christ and that makes us well-pleasing to Him. We are free from having to perform to earn His favor, although we must obey His commands.

Day Seven

23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, 25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, 27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, 29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, 32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,

the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, 33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, 36 the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, 37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, 38 the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

vs. 23-38 – Luke then traced Jesus’ lineage on his father’s. Matthew, writing primarily to Jews, traced Jesus’ genealogy back to Abraham. Luke, writing to the Roman world, traced Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam. It would take too much time and would be beyond my own scope of understanding, to discuss the meaning and philosophy behind an ancient genealogy.

The Lord told the serpent in the garden:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Jesus was that offspring and Luke wanted to prove that He was. Jesus did not just appear one day as a full-grown adult to minister. He was born of a virgin, raised as a Jew, released into ministry at the proper time (30 years of age was the youngest that any Levite could enter into active ministry), and did indeed crush the head of Satan and the kingdom of darkness. Jesus truly was the Son of Man, as this genealogy proves, but He was also the Son of God, as evidenced by His supernatural birth through the Holy Spirit.

Now that Luke has established Jesus’ credentials, so to speak, he then began to describe the events surrounding Jesus’ public ministry. And it is to this that we will turn our attention in coming weeks as we study the life of Jesus through the eyes of Luke, the beloved physician.