

Luke 3A

- And the end of Chapter 2, Luke gave us a fleeting picture of how Jesus lived as a boy
 - And especially how he came to live as both a man, in submission to earthly parents
 - And yet also as the Son of God, in obedience to the Father
 - Ultimately all of us walk that same fine line, and must learn to keep our priorities straight yet never make obedience to God excuse for sin
- Now in Chap 3 we jump forward to the very beginning of Christ's ministry
 - And back to the story of John the Baptist

[Luke 3:1](#) ¶ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, [Luke 3:2](#) in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

[Luke 3:3](#) And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

[Luke 3:4](#) as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.

[Luke 3:5](#) ‘EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED,
AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW;
THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT,
AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;

[Luke 3:6](#) AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.”

- Luke gives us some important historical markers at the beginning of this chapter
 - Markers for placing the time of these events
 - And for understanding some of the details that follow in the story
 - Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from AD 26 to late 36
 - Herod Antipas ruled as tetrarch of Galilee from 4BC to AD39

- His brother Herod Philip ruled northern Palestine from 4BC to AD 34
- No information is available on Lysanias
- It's interesting to see two High Priests named
 - Annas was the high priest from AD 6 to 15 until Romans removed him
 - Jews still regarded him as priest and he kept the title
 - Caiaphas was his son in law and served from AD18 to 37
 - We know from Matt that Caiaphas was the high priest serving in Jerusalem at this time
- So all these indicators tell us that John started his ministry between AD 26 and 37
 - Tiberius' 15th year was probably AD 29, which is likely the best date
- John hears from God while in the desert wilderness
 - John has apparently been living away from home for an extended period of time
 - Both Matt and Mark tell us that John ate honey and locusts and wore crude clothing made of camel's hair
 - He was living the life of a wild man – away from civilization
 - He probably relied on no one – completely separated from the rest of his townspeople
 - As we read down through this account it seems almost as if he has disappeared for some years only to be forgotten and either assumed dead or avoided as possessed
 - How early he left home is unclear, but since he was the same age as Jesus, he probably spent most of his life living completely alone in the wilderness
 - It makes you wonder why God saw fit to give John such a unique life in preparation for this ministry

- The answer to that question begins by recognizing the picture John provides for us in his ministry
- We've already said it was important that John prepare Jesus coming by gathering a following ready to respond to the call of Jesus
 - Much in the same way the Holy Spirit acts in the world today to prepare the hearts of those who are about to receive the Word of God which is Christ
 - The parable of the four seeds is a good picture of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christ in the work of bringing repentance and belief
 - The four seeds in the parable each see a different outcome based on the quality of the soil they find
 - The seed is always the same and it is the Word of God
 - But only in the good soil does the plant grow and prosper
 - And the Holy Spirit is the one Who prepares the soil of the hearer to receive the Word of God
 - Without that preparation, the word falls on deaf ears
- So John pictures the HS in ministry with Christ
 - And God called John the Baptist to ministry even while he was in the womb because He wanted John to be set apart from the world immediately
 - It could be that John left home even as a child, under the direction of the Holy Spirit
 - And his parents likely would have been given direction by the HS to allow him to leave
- And now he suddenly reappears in the local towns around the Jordan river preaching a need for repentance
 - This is a hard message and requires extreme integrity

- John would have not had much credibility if one day he had simply started preaching repentance to his own home town
 - Began in his house, then his town?
 - Too well known
 - God ensures that when he comes on the scene, he is a mysterious and compelling person
 - He has no baggage, though he no doubt had sin
 - His words aren't being filtered through a lens of familiarity
 - Remember, even Christ said that a prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown and household
 - God ensures John's anonymity among the people of the Jordan to ensure they are willing to hear his message
 - It's always the case that the success of our preaching or witnessing turns on our reputation
 - If John had been known by these people, then at his first comments, they would have responded that he was one to talk
 - Pot calling the kettle black
 - In fact, in the next chapter you can see Christ confronting exactly the same issue (4:23)
- I believe the Holy Spirit gains a measure of success in us in this same way...(example)
- He importance of John's independence becomes especially clear when we see what his ministry was like
 - The passage we read ended with a quote from Isa 40, telling how he will make the crooked straight and the rough smooth, etc.
 - Now we know Isaiah is not referring to the geography of the Palestinian lands
 - It's speaking spiritually

- John would bring men’s hearts back to a place where they would receive their Messiah
- John would bring the repentance process of turning hearts away from sin and toward righteousness, even before Christ appeared
- So watching how this happened in John’s day would be especially insightful for us today...how does God work to bring men back to himself

[Luke 3:7](#) ¶ So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

[Luke 3:8](#) “Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

[Luke 3:9](#) “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

[Luke 3:10](#) ¶ And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?”

[Luke 3:11](#) And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.”

[Luke 3:12](#) And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”

[Luke 3:13](#) And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.”

[Luke 3:14](#) *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And *what about* us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages.”

- John isn’t going to win any awards for motivational speaking now is
- John is preaching to crowds who come to him by the Jordan river
 - Some are attracted by the novelty no doubt
 - Some are curious what all the fuss is about
 - Some are attracted with false motives to undermine his ministry
 - And some feel compelled, they feel drawn, they are driven and they aren’t even sure why
- And by the description in the text, it’s also apparent that all manner of society are there

- We have workers and we have tax collectors and even Roman soldiers
- And when we compare this account to Matt and Mark, we also find out that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming down to investigate as well
 - In fact, these are the ones in view at the beginning of this passage who he calls vipers

[Matt. 3:7](#) ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”
[Matt. 3:8](#) “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

- So how is the Holy Spirit working through John and also pictured by John in this moment going to make these crooked paths straight for Christ?
 - We get our first insight by how John addresses the Pharisees
 - He calls them a brood of vipers, and very sarcastically says who warned you about the wrath to come?
 - They had appeared at in the crowd seemingly interested in the same things as the rest of the crowd – to repent and be baptized
 - But John knew who they were and he knew their motives weren’t pure
 - They were posing as regular people but merely to check out John and what he was saying
- Now John asks them who warned them about the wrath to come
 - Why would he ask them that? It sounds like he’s suggesting that only people who have been warned of God’s coming judgment would have had reason to come to the river
 - And this is precisely what John is saying
 - John knows that he is acting out the part of the Holy Spirit, but the real Holy Spirit is still active in the world preparing hearts for Christ’s coming
 - And these people who have been drawn to John are the people who the Holy Spirit has been wooing – speaking to their hearts about the coming judgment

- And just like the soil that must be prepared to receive the Word of God, the hearts of these people are being tilled as it were by the Holy Spirit
- So here's John asking thee Pharisees who warned them?
 - His sarcastic tone is an indication that he knows they haven't been drawn there by the Holy Spirit desiring repentance
 - In fact, John is asserting that they do not have the Holy Spirit working in them, so they are not even aware they need repentance
 - Look at his next statements to them:
 - Bear fruit in keeping with repentance
 - And don't think that simply being born of Abraham is enough to assure you of salvation
 - He finally tells them that the tree they are a part of – the nation of Israel, on other words – is about to be pruned back for unbelief
 - John is calling them out as unbelievers, unrighteous men who need to repent, though they don't know it because they lack the ministry of the Holy Spirit to understand their own sinfulness
- So John's ministry to bring men and women back to the Lord begins with a reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit to draw men to the work of redemption
 - Even John himself alludes to God's role in bringing men to Him in his rebuke of the Pharisees
 - He tells them not to rely on their heritage to find favor with God, because God doesn't need the heritage of Abraham to call men to Himself.
 - If needed, He could bring men from rocks to worship Him, making the point that it is the power of God that draws believers
 - Christ Himself said in John

[John 6:44](#) “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws** him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

- And the Father uses the Holy Spirit to draw men to Him, just as He is using John the Baptist to prepare men for Christ

- Going back to Isaiah’s prophecy of John the Baptist, how does God ensure that John is going to make straight paths for Jesus?
 - He begins by sending His Holy Spirit to draw men toward John, ready for a message of repentance, with hearts that have been prepared and seek righteousness
 - But is that enough? No.
 - If you till the soil in your garden, do plants automatically begin to grow (not weeds)?
 - No, you need seed of some kind
- As we look further at the passage, consider the instructions John gives the people who gather
 - He is giving examples of the fruit of true repentance, so they may know when repentance is genuine
 - These were examples that ran completely against the culture
 - He also is telling the people to do what they know is right, to be generous and be caring for one another
 - In a word, to show love for one another
 - Ultimately, he is pointing them to the author of Love – to Christ

[Luke 3:15](#) ¶ Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ,

[Luke 3:16](#) John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

[Luke 3:17](#) “His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

[Luke 3:18](#) ¶ So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

- Take note of the work of the Holy Spirit here
 - He has prepared these people so that the end result of all they are experiencing is to look forward to a Messiah

- They even ask if John is that Christ
 - But of course John says no
 - But then he points them to their Christ, and as it says he preached the gospel to the people
- And now we have the final piece for how John would accomplish the prophecy given in Isaiah.
 - Have been drawn by the Holy Spirit, then taught of the need to repent and seek after righteousness and love
 - Now they are pointed to their salvation
 - And when he arrives, the people will be ready and waiting
 - The paths for Christ to walk in redeeming his bride will have been prepared by John the Baptist
 - And their response to their new-found faith is to be baptized
 - Of course, the baptism they received by John was merely to picture the true baptism of the Holy Spirit that all believers would enjoy
- This is how the Holy Spirit acts within the world today
 - When God desires to bring the knowledge of Christ to a man or woman, he prepares their hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit
 - He brings them to a recognition of coming judgment
 - He prepares the ground of their heart, giving them a desire to seek and to knock, as Christ puts it
 - But the fact that God must act first to draw man to Himself should never leave us to forget the second half of this process
 - As John the Baptist demonstrates, God purposes to work through men to bring the message of Christ to their hearts
 - We are the ones who must preach the gospel message, to deliver the hard message about turning from an unbelieving way and all the sins it produces

- To persuade them to embrace the coming Christ
 - Yes, we work to persuade men

[2Cor. 5:11](#) ¶ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men...

[2Cor. 5:18](#) Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,

[2Cor. 5:19](#) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

[2Cor. 5:20](#) ¶ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- We persuade because we have been entrusted with this task
- And work to persuade because we desire to be the one through whom God will work
- But ultimately, each person must have a personal experience with Christ to know Him and believe
 - And they meet Christ through the Word of God (Rom 10:8)
- Therefore, we are to sow the Word of God liberally, like the parable says, all over the place
 - And when it falls on prepared soil, we are to persuade men of the truth of the gospel – as John did
- But did you notice how bold that preaching was
 - There is no soft sell here
 - John wasn't trying to sneak it in or make it more palatable
 - Wed night teaching
 - There must be offense if the hearer is to feel the pressure to decide and change
- And as will often happen when you preach the gospel unapologetically, John finds himself persecuted

[Luke 3:19](#) But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, [Luke 3:20](#) Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

- Now we will have the opportunity to better understand the historical references that Luke gave at the beginning of the chapter
 - Herodias was the wife of Herod Philip I, one of the sons of Herod the Great
 - Herod Philip had a brother Herod Antipas who took a liking to Herodias and she to him
 - So Herod Antipas took Herodias from his brother and made her his wife, even though she was still married to Herod Philip
- It was this adulterous relationship that John criticized publicly that led Herod to arrest John and ultimately murder him at the request of Herodias' daughter
 - Interestingly, John continued to preach to Herod even while in prison

[Mark 6:20](#) for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.

- Don't be naïve about how much the enemy hates us for preaching the gospel boldly
 - So few Christians truly suffer persecution for their faith and their beliefs because so few of us are willing to actually make a bold proclamation anywhere

[Matt. 5:11](#) ¶ "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

[Matt. 5:12](#) "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

[John 15:20](#) "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they **persecuted** Me, they will also **persecute** you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- Our persecutions need not include martyrdom for our faith, but how about just feeling uncomfortable