

Luke 3:1-14 The Forerunner

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Date: 19 January 2020

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[0 : 00] Please let's turn in God's Word to Luke chapter 3, Luke chapter 3. And we're going to read the first 14 verses, the first 14 verses of Luke chapter 3 and consider them together this morning.

Luke chapter 3, I'm beginning to read at verse 1 down to verse 14. Luke chapter 3, verse 1. This is the Word of God.

And he went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his path straight. Every valley shall be filled.

And every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight. And the rough places shall become level ways. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

[1 : 29] He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children from Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.

Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And the crowds asked him, What then shall we do? And he answered them, Whoever has two cheniks is to share with him who has none.

And whoever has food is to do likewise. Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them, Collect no more than you are authorized to do.

Soldiers also asked him, And we, what shall we do? And he said to them, Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation. And be content with your wages.

[2 : 35] Amen. This is the reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Turn please to Isaiah 40. Isaiah 40, it is of course the great promise, the great assurance through the prophet that the Lord would send one ahead of his anointed, one ahead of his chosen, which we read of in Luke's gospel this morning in John the Baptist.

Isaiah chapter 40. I'm going to read the whole of the chapter together. Isaiah chapter 40, beginning to read at verse 1.

This is the word of God. Comfort. Comfort, my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low.

The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

[4 : 05] A voice says, Cry. And I said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of a field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows on it.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news.

Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news. Lift it up, fear not. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God. Behold the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him.

Behold his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains and scales, and the hills in a balance?

[5 : 19] Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? Or what man shows him counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

Behold the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales. Behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.

All the nations are as nothing before him. They are accounted by him as less than nothing, and emptiness. To whom then will you liken God?

Or what likeness compare with him? An idol? A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains. He who is too impoverished for an offering, chooses wood that will not rot.

He who seeks out a skilled craftsman, to set up an idol that will not move. Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning?

[6 : 25] Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in, who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me?

That I should be like him, says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who created these. He who brings out their hosts by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might.

And because he is strong in power, not one is missing. What do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel? My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

[7 : 36] He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength. Even youth shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.

But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's turn in God's word, please.

Let's turn in the word of God to Luke chapter 3. If we have it open in front of us, it'll help us. Luke chapter 3 in God's word in these first 14 verses.

Luke chapter 3 and verses 1 through 14. I'm sure I've told you this before, but there was a documentary on Amazon Prime recently called All or Nothing, which followed Manchester City Football Club through a season.

[8 : 38] And one of the things that struck me about watching the documentary was that often the key people at the club aren't the key people you would assume to be. You would assume that the players would be some of the key staff.

You'd assume that the manager, that the director would be some of the key staff. But actually it was the relatively insignificant people who kept everyone happy. It was the physio who made sure that people weren't injured.

It was the masseuse who massaged sore legs after training and after matches. And the key person of all actually was the kit man. Because the kit man was the one who was responsible for knowing what each player liked.

They were the one who had to make sure whether a player preferred a long-sleeved or a short-sleeved shirt. They were the one who had to know what sort of socks the player wanted to wear. And it was the kit man's responsibility to ensure that each morning as the player arrived for training, that each day as the player arrived for matches, that all of the kit was at his peg.

When the player arrived, all he had to do was get changed. The kit man went ahead and made sure everything was ready. The kit man went ahead and made sure that everything was prepared for the players to come.

[9 : 55] And as we come to Luke chapter 3 this morning, as we consider the ministry of John the Baptist in Luke chapter 3 this morning, we see John's job is very similar to the kit man, isn't it?

It's his job to go ahead. It's his job to make sure that everything's ready. It's his job to make sure that the path is ready for the Messiah when he comes.

For the promised Son of God to come. To make sure the crowds are ready to receive the Christ. It's his job.

It's his ministry to prepare the way. We want to see three things this morning. Think about three things this morning. Firstly, we want to think about kingdom preparation.

What exactly it is that John would do. What exactly his ministry would entail. Secondly then, we want to think about kingdom entry. How it was that you entered this new kingdom.

[10 : 53] How it was that you entered the kingdom of God. Because as we see with John, not everyone who comes to him receives a warm welcome. Not everyone who comes to him receives a good reception.

So how then would people enter this new kingdom of God? Thirdly then, finally, we want to think about kingdom ethics. We want to see how this kingdom changes how the people live.

How this baptism that John preaches changes the way that the people live and behave. So firstly then, kingdom preparation. Kingdom preparation.

And we see that in verses 1 through 6. Verses 1 through 6 of Luke's gospel in chapter 3. We finished last week with Jesus being left behind in Jerusalem.

With Jesus staying behind in Jerusalem to discuss with the religious leaders the word of God. And as we move on then to chapter 3, it's obvious that quite some time has elapsed. Because this is going to be the beginning of the ministry of Christ.

- [11 : 51] It's leading into the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus in Luke chapter 2 was 12 years old. And as we come to Luke chapter 3, near the beginning of his ministry, it's obvious that a fair amount of time has passed.

And as we come to Luke chapter 3 in verse 1, we see that we're given some background information by Luke. And to be honest, it's easy to gloss over this information in verse 1 and not make too much of it to just say, well, you know, it is what it is.

But as we look at it this morning, it gives us some confidence. As we have this seemingly list of random information here, it gives us some confidence in what we read in Luke's Gospel.

Remember, Luke told us what was Luke's purpose. Those opening chapters of Luke, those opening verses of Luke chapter 1, what is it that he says? I've undertaken to compile an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may be sure of the things that you've been taught, so that you may be sure of the things that you've been told.

Luke has undertaken a careful study, and as we come to chapter 3, and see this seemingly list, the random list of names, we see that Luke has done what he said he's done.

- [13 : 05] Luke has undertaken this careful study. Luke has compiled this narrative of things that have taken place. These people were all in the jobs that Luke says they were in.

They were all doing the things that Luke says that they do. This isn't some sort of hodgepodge of history. This is Luke having undertaken a careful study, being guided by the Holy Spirit, increasing our confidence in what we read.

This is a historical document. It's a document that is historically accurate. It's well researched, well thought out. And it increases our confidence as we come to know that Luke has done what he said he would do.

But notice also that it's a dark time. We can skip over it, as we say, as just a list of names that are fairly meaningless to us now.

But it's a dark time. Most of the men listed in these opening verses of Luke chapter 3 are bad men. They're power-hungry megalomaniacs and they'll do anything to stay in control.

- [14 : 14] Pontius Pilate, of course, in a few years' time would refuse to stand up to the crowd, even though he knew Jesus had done nothing wrong. Herod, who would murder John the Baptist, why? Because he'd made a promise.

It was a dark time in terms of politics. They were difficult days. But that's when God sent his son. They were dark days politically, yes.

They were difficult days politically, yes. But that's when God sent his son. These were the days when God called John to make straight paths for the Messiah. These were the days when God called John to start his ministry in these dark days.

And we can become so easily discouraged when we look at our politicians. We see the lack of morality. We see the lack of biblical understanding.

We see the lack of care for the things of God's word. But let's remind ourselves, friends, as we read this in Luke chapter 3, that that was exactly what the world was like when God sent his son.

- [15 : 25] That was exactly what the world was like when Jesus came, when the gospel turned the world upside down, when the good news of Jesus Christ went forth. The gospel has that power.

The gospel has that ability to turn the world upside down. To call people out of darkness into light. We don't compromise with the immorality of the world we see around us.

We don't compromise with the standards God expresses in his word. But we don't lose hope. Because it was in the midst of this darkness that God sent forth his son.

That the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. The gospel has that power. That ability to turn the world upside down.

So don't lose hope. So we have this list of names, verse 1. These people who are ruling. These people who are in charge. Then we come to verse 2. And we're told that this happened during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.

[16 : 30] Now strictly speaking, there could only be one high priest. I mean that was that was how it worked. That was the deal really. There's one high priest. Annas had been the high priest but he'd been removed from office for political reasons if you like.

His son-in-law Caiaphas had been put in his place. Now Caiaphas held the office. Caiaphas was the high priest but Annas was the power behind the throne if you like. Caiaphas may have had the title but Annas had the power.

I was thinking about this in terms of our recent election that we had here in the UK. You know a lot of people said that the power behind the conservative machine was really Dominic Cummings.

He was the one pulling the strings. He wasn't standing for office but he was the one who was directing affairs. That's how it is with Annas. He doesn't hold the office as such but he holds the power.

And it's when all of this is happening when all of this is going on verses 1 and 2 that what happens the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

[17 : 37] the word of God that's been silent for centuries. The word of God that has brought no fresh prophecy no fresh revelation.

The voice of God that has been silent for centuries but now God is speaking again. Now God is calling out people to himself. God is calling people to proclaim his word and in response notice what John does.

he goes into all the countryside verse 3 the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The word of God comes fresh and what does it call people to do? The voice of God is heard once again and what does it call people to do?

It calls them to repent. It calls them to return to God to turn to God. Now the Jews here wouldn't have been unfamiliar with baptism so as John goes out preaching as John goes out proclaiming this baptism for the repentance for the forgiveness of sins the Jews kind of they would have understood it they would have got what John was talking about but it was for the Gentiles that was how they came to know God that was how they cleansed themselves that was how they washed themselves that was how they shewed their contrition and now John is here calling them to repentance John here is calling them to submit themselves to this ceremonial washing to commit themselves to God when the word of God comes to us it calls us to repentance it calls us to turn from sin and turn to God you see the Bible isn't a the Bible isn't a self-help book it's not a 12 steps to a more empowered life book it isn't a 12 steps to a fulfilling life book it's a book that calls us to repentance it's a book that calls us to turn from sin and turn to God the religious people like the Jews are called to repent and turn to God the irreligious people like the Gentiles are called to repent and turn to God maybe you're here this morning and you've been a religious person all your life you've done church

[20 : 15] Sunday by Sunday by Sunday you've given your envelope week by week by week if you've never come to Christ the Bible's calling you to repent maybe you're here and you're deeply irreligious you've no interest you've no time for God you've no time for the things of Christ God calls you to repent to turn from sin and turn to Him then we have these very famous words these words that we we read from Isaiah the prophet about the forerunner about who John is what John's job calling was what the description was he's one crying in the wilderness he's one who's making way for the Lord that every valley shall be filled every mountain shall be made low the crooked will become straight the rough places level ways every obstacle to the coming

Messiah every obstacle to the coming Christ will be removed and all flesh verse 6 all flesh shall see the salvation of God that's the kingdom preparation work that John engages in then he's getting people ready he's calling them to repentance he's calling them to turn from sin and turn to Christ he's getting them ready for the coming king secondly then we want to think about kingdom entry kingdom entry and we see that in verses 7 through 9 so John's been preaching he's been telling people look you need to have a baptism for the repentance for the forgiveness of sins he's very conscious of his ministry he's very conscious of the role that he's playing but notice what he says in verse 7 notice that he knows man the crowds are flocking to him everyone's coming to hear what John has to say and what does he say verse 7 he said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him you brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come it's not exactly good morning nice to see you is it you brood of vipers these are the people who were coming to hear him these are the people who were interested in what he had to say these are the people if you like who were fans and John says well you brood of vipers now how do we understand what's going on here what do we make of this because as we see in a few moments

John's actually quite kind to some people who come to him the tax collector the soldier as they come to him John's quite kind and giving them advice he's quite kind in teaching them so how do we explain what we read here in verse 7 well some of the other gospels help us understand what's going on here the people John refers to here though Luke doesn't record it for us are the Pharisees the scribes the tax the scribes and the Pharisees sorry these are the outwardly religious people these are the people who had a vested interest in the law of God if you like and now that John's starting to teach people now that John's starting to attract a bit of a following these people say well we better figure out what's going on we better go and listen to this guy John see what he's saying because after all we're the religious leaders after all we're the ones who teach people the word of God what John's getting at here is that these people weren't really interested in what's going on they weren't really interested in repenting they wanted to just see

John they wanted to keep tabs on him they wanted to keep a check on him they wanted to see what all the fuss is about it's backed up by what we read in verse 8 isn't it because what does he say who warned you to flee from the wrath to come then verse 8 bear fruits in keeping with repentance bear fruits in keeping with repentance it wasn't enough to just come and see him it wasn't enough to just hear his message it wasn't even enough just to be baptized by him they had to bear fruit they had to show in their lives that they had truly repented and John almost seems to read their mind in verse 8 doesn't he bear fruits in keeping with repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father the Jews were proud of their Abrahamic descent they were proud of who their ancestors were they were proud of their heritage proud of their connections and John says it doesn't matter bear fruit in keeping with repentance there was a post put up on my old school's

Facebook page yesterday I think it was the day before maybe congratulating Paul Sterling Paul Sterling was a friend of mine he plays cricket for Ireland he'd helped Ireland beat the West Indies in a cricket match the day before and the school put up this post congratulating him on the role that he played they wanted to have this connection with him now Paul Sterling I haven't been at school in I dread to think how many years now 17 years Paul Sterling was two years below me so he hasn't been to school in 15 years but they wanted to keep that connection they wanted to keep that sort of bond with him if you like they wanted to appeal to his connection to try and help them and that's how it was for the Jews here they're tempted to look to Abraham they're tempted to say well look we have Abraham as our father we have this connection with Abraham we have this special role in the place of God and John says to them well look it doesn't matter it's not making any difference it's not changing how you live day to day having this connection with

[26 : 31] Abraham even from these stones John says God can raise up children for Abraham now we know that's one of the great promises of the Old Testament isn't it Abraham would be the father of many nations that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky as the sand on the seashore and the Jews heard this and perhaps rested on their laurels a little bit they said well we have this promise we have this outward connection to Abraham we have this promise that Abraham will have lots of offspring so really it doesn't matter how we live because we know we're children of God we know we're children of Abraham that's what God promised all those years ago John says no even from these stones God could raise children from Abraham having a connection this morning to all of the right religious people doesn't make you right with

God coming to the free church this morning doesn't make you right with God having had Christian parents grandparents having Christian brothers or sisters does not make you a Christian this morning having all of the right religious connections doesn't make you a Christian trusting Jesus Christ is what makes you a Christian repenting of sin and turning to Christ is what makes you a Christian having that living personal relationship with Jesus is what makes you a Christian don't appeal to your heritage don't appeal to the denomination you go to but appeal to Christ every tree John says verse 9 every tree that doesn't bear fruit will be cut down and burned up doesn't matter if it's a

Jewish tree doesn't matter if it's a Gentile tree doesn't matter what kind of tree it is if it doesn't bear fruit then it's in the fire kingdom entry then doesn't depend on ethnicity it doesn't depend on birth or ancestry but entry into the kingdom of God depends on having a living vital connection to Christ thirdly finally this morning we want to think about the kingdom ethics and we see that in verses 10 through 14 so this was the message given to some of the religious leaders you brood of vipers who warned you who told you to flee from the wrath to come but the message that John preached obviously resonated with some of the people who heard it because we see what they say in verse 10 well the crowds asked them what then shall we do if this is what you've said if you've told us to bear fruit and keep in with repentance if you've told us to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins what does that look like how does that show itself in how we live so

John tells them John applies their message to their hearts if you like and that's one of the things that makes a sermon fundamentally different from a lecture you see a sermon tries to change how you live how you think about God a sermon tries to apply God's word to your life a lecture has no application a lecture simply wants to impart information to you wants you to leave knowing more stuff but the whole purpose of a sermon is that your life is more and more conformed to the image of Christ and what does John tell them well verse verse 11 whoever has two tunics whoever has an abundance if you like is to share with him who is none whoever has no food is to do likewise and notice verse 12 specific groups come to him specific groups want to know what they have to do verse 12 the tax collectors come and say well what does it mean to us we've heard your sermon we've heard what you said now what does it mean for us what does it mean tomorrow as I go to my tax booth what does

John say to him look don't collect any more than you're supposed to and be baptized the same with the soldiers who come to him verse 14 soldiers also ask them what shall we do we've heard your sermon we've heard what you've said but how does it affect us as we go to the garrison how does it affect us as we go out on patrol and John says well verse 14 don't extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be content with the wages you get we want to notice two things just as we finish this morning we want to see two things together first thing we notice is that John doesn't tell these people to leave their jobs he doesn't say that their new found faith in God and in Christ is incompatible with their jobs rather basically what he says is that in your job live out your new found faith make a difference be salt and light wherever you are and friends that's what we're called to do to make a difference where we are to be salt and light in the communities that God has placed us in there are very few jobs that cannot be done to the glory of God whatever you're going to do tomorrow whatever you're getting up at to go to work at tomorrow get up and work at it with all your might into the glory of God and it doesn't matter what you do but secondly we also notice that each profession if you like had temptations particular to it the temptation for the tax collector was to steal the temptation for the tax collector was to take more than he was due the temptation for the soldier was to get what he wanted by threats by intimidation and by violence and John says don't do that rather live a Christian life the message that John preached came with ethical implications their lives had to be different once they came into the kingdom of God their lives had to be changed once they came to know Christ their lives changed after but not before we're saved not by our works we're saved by faith alone but never faith that remains alone what are the particular temptations that arise as a result of your works for the tax collector it was to steal for the soldier it was to threaten what are the particular temptations that arise out of your work perhaps you're here this morning and you're retired but what are the particular temptations that come to you as someone who's retired in what ways are you growing in grace and holiness where the Lord has planted you this kingdom comes with a new kingdom ethic and we must be living that ethic out we must be living lives that are worthy of the kingdom of God to prove that we're members of the kingdom to prove that we have repented to prove that we've come to know Christ we're not saved by our works we're saved by faith alone but our works show who our master is the kingdom comes with a new kingdom ethic and we must be living that out in our day to day lives showing people the difference that Christ makes to us

[34 : 44] Amen thank you so much so much data we're not