

April 3rd, 2022

“Prepare the way of the Lord”

Luke 3:1-6

Read Luke 3:1-2a... Luke begins this chapter by naming seven men, and giving a timeframe, to set the historical background for the beginning of John’s ministry.

The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar would have been A.D. 26, because Tiberius became co-regent with Augustus (the previous Caesar), in A.D. 11.

John would have been about 30 years of age in A.D. 26, because he was just 6 months older than Jesus, and Luke tells us (**Luke 3:23**), Jesus was about thirty years of age when He began His ministry.

The next man mentioned is Pontius Pilate, appointed governor of Judea by Tiberius Caesar, in A.D. 26. Pilate served until A.D. 36, when he was removed, because of his inability to maintain control of the Jews.

Luke now moves to Herod and his brother Philip; two of the sons of Herod the Great (who died in 4. B.C., when Jesus was about two years of age).

The Herod mentioned in **verse 1**, is Herod Antipas, who ruled the region around Galilee until A.D. 39. His brother Philip ruled the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis (northeast of Galilee); it was Philip’s wife (Herodias) with whom his brother Antipas had an adulterous affair and was confronted by John, leading to John’s death.

The third local ruler was Lysanias (not much is known about him), he ruled the area of Abilene (northwest of Damascus).

The five men we have just talked about were Gentiles, now Luke records two Jewish high priests: Annas and Caiaphas. Annas was Israel’s high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15, when he was removed from office by Valerius, the man who became governor of Judea after Pilate was removed.

Annas’s son-in-law, Caiaphas was Israel’s high priest from A.D. 18 to A.D. 36. Just like previous presidents of the United States retain the title of “Mr. President,” even after they leave office, so it was with Israel’s high priests. In fact, according to Mosaic law (cf. Numbers 35:25), high priests served for life.

Annas was well connected to prominent and powerful Jews, and also Gentiles (who could benefit him). Annas was the family patriarch of the men who had ruled the high priesthood in Israel for 20 years, and as such, he held much power over the people (after Annas’s removal as high priest, five of his sons and one of his grandsons served as high priest, and now his son-in-law was high priest).

One thing that Annas and Caiaphas had in common was their hatred of Jesus, Who had (two times) disrupted their very lucrative business in the temple (cf. **John 2:13-16; Matthews 21:12-13**). Another thing they had in common was their greed. They were both receiving a share of the money paid by the people who came to get an approved animal for sacrifice; they also got a share of the fees the money changers were charging to exchange foreign currency, as the temple tax had to be paid in Jewish currency.

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Annas’s greed was so well known that the outer courts, where the sacrificial animals were sold and the money changers were ripping people off, became known as the Bazaar of Annas, i.e., Annas’s own private enterprise.

Read Luke 3:2b-3... The desolate and barren wilderness area of Judea stretched from the western hill country of Judah to the Dead Sea in the east, and then went north to the Jordan River valley. That is where John, under the power of God’s Spirit, stepped out and began calling Israel to repentant.

As I mentioned last week, we don’t know anything about John’s childhood or young adulthood. Luke tells us, at John’s circumcision, after Zacharias prophesied about the ministry his son would have (**Luke 1:80**), “the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

We know his parents were “advanced in years” (**Luke 1:7**), and it is likely they died while he was young. But when it was time for him to step out onto the world stage and fulfill his mission Luke says, “the word [*rhema*] of God came to John.”

God called-out John to ministry, just as He had the prophets to the Old Testament (cf. **Jeremiah 1:1-2; Ezekiel 1:3; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah; Haggai 1:1**), “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai.”

John went from being an unknown, to being a Prophet of God, proclaiming the word of God, breaking God’s silence with Israel, calling the people to repent of sin.

Israel had turned the special relationship they had been given with God [as His called-out people], into a legalistic, ritualistic religion based on human works.

During Jesus’ first sermon (Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 5-7**), He made it clear that religious rituals and law-keeping will not save anyone, because God’s standard for relationship with Him is perfect holiness.

Eternal relationship with God (cf. **Matthew 5:1-12**) is granted to those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are gentle, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are peacemakers, those who are persecuted because of Christ; they will inherit the kingdom of heaven, for they are sons and daughters of God.

The prideful and showy public displays of praying, fasting, tithing, and giving to the poor, as the religious leaders of Israel exhibited, were nothing but outward acts, reflective (cf. **Matthew 7:13-14; 21-23**) of those who are on the broad road that leads to death and destruction in hell, rather than the narrow path (that only a few find) that leads to life and exaltation in heaven.

Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who realize they are damned apart from the saving grace that has come through God’s Son.

The Jewish people knew forgiveness was promised through the prophets.

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Jeremiah 31:34, “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord, for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Psalms 32:1-2, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! “ 5, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’; and You forgave the guilt of my sin.”

Psalms 130: 3-4, “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.”

Isaiah 1:18, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.’”

Micah 7:19, “He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot... cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Zacharias had prophesied (**Luke 1:76-77**) that John would declare forgiveness from God, to all who acknowledge their sin and repent, to receive forgiveness.

Ezekiel 18:30-32, “‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Therefore, repent and live.’”

Romans 12:9, “Abhor [hate, turn away from] what is evil; cling to [follow, do] what is good.”

Biblical repentance is to turn away from sin and turn toward God for salvation; This kind of repentance is not just about regret, guilt, or shame; but it strongly implies making a decision to turn around, do an about face, and head in a new direction; to hate life apart from God, and to love life with God, through Christ.

1Corinthians 1:18-21, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

2Corinthians 7:9-11, “I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance... ..For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance leading to salvation, without regret; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

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True repentance that brings salvation is a willful response to the Holy Spirit’s conviction in your heart (**John 16:8-9**), “And He [the Holy Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me [Jesus Christ].”

John the baptizer was (cf. **Luke 3:3**) “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” The baptism of John was not Christian baptism symbolizing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; because Christian baptism was not instituted until the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit of God came upon and indwelt the 120 believers in Jerusalem; after which, Peter began to preach.

Acts 2:21, “And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” **36-38**, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

At the time of John’s appearance in **Luke 3**, there was no baptism for Jews in Judaism. However, the Jews did baptize Gentile converts to Judaism, Gentiles who wanted to turn from their pagan worship and idolatry to serve the God of the Jews, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

The Jews who came out to John (cf. **Matthew 3:6**), “were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.” Jews were acknowledging that they were sinners just like the Gentiles they despised. But it would seem most of those being baptized were not truly repentant, for we know the nation of Israel later rejected their Messiah [Jesus Christ], and put him to death on a cross.

Matthew 3:7-11, “But when [John] 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? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can 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. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Water symbolizes a desire for a clean conscience, i.e., to acknowledge your sins, to publicly state you have sinned against God and are seeking God’s forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit symbolizes spiritual birth into God’s family, as a genuine believer who is marked and protected by God’s Spirit.

Fire symbolizes judgment, for those who reject Christ do not have the Holy Spirit in them, they are condemned to the Lake of Fire.

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Read Luke 3:4-6... Seven hundred years before John was born, this prophecy was made about him (pp. **Isaiah 40:3-5**). We have already studied how John fulfilled this prophecy, calling out people to acknowledge their sin before God and to repent, for John was, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight’”

But look again at **verse 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; And all flesh will see the salvation of God.”

This seems rather obscure at first reading, but further study brings to light the meaning. When a prominent person was traveling on a long journey, perhaps in country unknown to him; he would send messengers out ahead to make sure that the roads were safe and free of danger and debris, i.e., to fill in holes, and remove obstacles, so that their master could pass through without incident.

That is exactly what John did for his Master! He prepared the people for the coming Messiah! Calling them to genuinely repent, confessing their sins, and turning their hearts back to God, so that they might “see the salvation of God,” Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Lord of all, but the Savior only of those who believe in Him.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and that He alone provides forgiveness for sin and eternal life?

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

No wonder Jesus said (**John 14:6**), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father [*i.e., no one is forgiven, no one receives eternal life, no one gets into heaven*] but through Me.”

There is only one way to be saved (**2Corinthians 5:20-21**), “Therefore, [as an] ambassador for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through [me]; [I] beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [God the Father] made [God the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on [your] behalf, so that [you] might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

1Timothy 2:3-4, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Remember what Peter proclaimed in **Acts 2:21**, “And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [*for the forgiveness of sin*] will be saved.”

Have you done that?

Romans 10:9-10, “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” **13**, “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Pastor Mike

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