

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 4: John the Baptist, the Baptism, and the Genealogy -- Luke 3:1-38

For four hundred years the heavens over Israel had been quiet. No prophet had risen, no fresh word had come, and a faithful remnant kept waiting for the God who had promised that He would not forget His people. Then, out in the wilderness near the Jordan, a wild and weathered man begins to preach, and the silence breaks like a dam. Luke takes great pains to tell us exactly when this happened, naming the emperor, the governor, the tetrarchs, and the high priests (3:1-2). He wants us to know that the word of God came to John not in the realm of myth but in the hard daylight of real history, while Tiberius sat on Rome's throne and Pilate ruled Judea. The God of heaven was about to act, and He set His clock by the calendars of empires.

John's message was not gentle. He called the crowds to "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (3:3), and when they came out to him in droves he did not flatter them. He called them a brood of vipers, warned them not to hide behind their family tree, and demanded fruit. Repentance, John insisted, is not a feeling you have at the riverbank; it is a life that changes. So the crowds asked, the tax collectors asked, even the soldiers asked, "What then shall we do?" (3:10), and John gave them answers as practical as their daily work: share your coat, stop cheating, be content with your wages. He was preparing a road through human hearts, leveling every proud mountain and lifting every despairing valley so that, as Isaiah had promised, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (3:6).

But John knew he was only the voice, not the Word. He kept pointing past himself to one mightier than he, whose sandals he was not worthy to untie, who would baptize not merely with water but "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:16). And then that Mightier One came and stepped down into the river like any other sinner needing to be cleansed, though He had no sin of His own. When Jesus was baptized and was praying, heaven tore open. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and the Father's voice rolled down from the sky: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:22). In a single moment the whole Godhead was unveiled at the Jordan, the Father speaking, the Son standing in the water, the Spirit descending, and heaven set its seal on Jesus before He preached a single sermon.

Luke then does something a modern reader is tempted to skip. He gives us a long list of names, tracing Jesus back through David and Abraham, and then past Abraham all the way to "Adam, the son of God" (3:38). Matthew's genealogy stops at Abraham, the father of the Jews, but Luke keeps going, back to the first man, the father of us all. He is telling us something we dare not miss. This Jesus is not merely the hope of one nation. He is the second Adam, the true man, joined by blood to every human being who has ever drawn breath. The salvation John announced is for all flesh, for the tax collector and the soldier, for the Jew and the Gentile, for you. Read these verses slowly, and ask what it would mean to bear the fruit of real repentance and to belong to the One whom heaven calls beloved.

Group Discussion: John told the crowds to “bear fruits in keeping with repentance” and not to presume on their heritage by saying “We have Abraham as our father” (3:8). It is easy, even in the church, to trust in our background, our baptism long ago, or our family name rather than in a life that is actually changing. Where do we see this tendency to coast on the past in our own day, and what does it look like when repentance produces real, visible fruit instead of just good intentions?

Personal Reflection: When the crowds were cut to the heart, they asked John a deeply practical question: “What then shall we do?” (3:10), and his answers reached right into their wallets, their jobs, and their daily honesty. If you asked John that same question this week, what specific area of your life, your money, your work, your speech, your appetites, do you sense the Spirit pressing you to change? What is one concrete fruit of repentance God may be asking of you right now?

Read Luke 3:1–38

Study Questions

1. Luke anchors the coming of John in precise history, naming Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, and the high priests Annas and Caiaphas (3:1–2), and says “the word of God came to John” in the wilderness. What does this careful historical setting teach us about the nature of God’s saving work and the reliability of the gospel, and why does it matter that salvation entered real time and real places rather than the world of legend?
2. John refused to let the crowds hide behind their heritage, warning, “Do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father” (3:8). In what ways are you tempted to rest on your spiritual background, a past decision, or your church involvement rather than on a faith that is presently bearing fruit? Where might God be exposing a gap between your reputation and your real walk with Him?
3. John preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3) and insisted that those who came must “bear fruits in keeping with repentance” (3:8). What does this passage teach about the true nature of repentance, and how does John’s preaching connect repentance and baptism to the forgiveness of sins and prepare the way for the gospel that comes after the cross?
4. When the crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers each asked, “What then shall we do?” John gave them concrete commands: share your clothing and food, collect no more than you are owed, do not extort, and be content with your wages (3:10–14). Why do you think John pressed repentance into such ordinary, daily matters, and what would it look like for your repentance to reach into the specific details of your work, money, and relationships this week?
5. John pointed away from himself to one mightier, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3:16), and he spoke of a winnowing fork that gathers the wheat and burns the chaff (3:17). What does this teach about the supremacy of

Christ over even the greatest prophet, and about the coming separation between those who belong to Him and those who do not?

6. John was a man entirely comfortable being small so that Christ could be great, declaring himself unworthy even to untie the Messiah's sandal (3:16). Where in your own life do you find it hard to decrease so that Jesus can increase, and what would genuine humility, the kind that gladly points away from self toward Christ, look like in your relationships and service this week?
7. Even after the crowds streamed to him, John kept preaching boldly, and when he rebuked Herod for his sin, Herod "added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison" (3:19-20). What does this passage teach about the cost of speaking God's truth faithfully and about the difference between fearing God and fearing those who hold earthly power?
8. John was not afraid to confront a king, telling Herod the truth about his evil deeds even though it cost him his freedom (3:19-20). Think of a relationship or situation where you have stayed silent about sin or truth out of fear of the cost. What would it look like for you to speak with both courage and love, and what is holding you back?
9. At the baptism of Jesus, heaven opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and the Father's voice declared, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:21-22). What does this scene reveal about the nature of the one true God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what does the Father's testimony declare about the deity and unique sonship of Jesus as He begins His ministry?
10. Look back across the whole passage, from John's call for fruitful repentance, to the Father's voice over His beloved Son, to the genealogy that traces Jesus through David and Abraham all the way to "Adam, the son of God" (3:38), showing that Jesus is the Savior of all people. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 3:1-38 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 40:3-5, the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord, which John fulfills; Acts 19:1-5, disciples who had received only John's baptism and were then baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus; Acts 2:38, Peter's command to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins; Matthew 3:8-10, the parallel call to bear fruit worthy of repentance; Romans 5:12-19, Christ as the second Adam through whom righteousness and life come to all.