

Commentary on Luke chapter 3, by Chuck Smith 6.12.22

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June memory verse Romans 6:14&15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

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As Luke begins the third chapter, he is giving you the date of the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist, and he uses no less than six historic references points to tell you when John began his ministry.

It was in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, and Herod was the tetrarch ([Luk 3:1](#))

And the word "tetrarch" means a ruler of a fourth part. And when Herod the Great died, he left the ruling of that area, they divided it into four, and three of his sons ruled over a part of the area. So a tetrarch was a ruler of a fourth part, and Philip the tetrarch of Iturea, Herod the tetrarch of Galilee,

and his brother Philip the tetrarch of Iturea in the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests ([Luk 3:1-2](#)),

And so these were the historic dating reference points.

Now we know that Tiberius Ceasar began his reign in the years 13-14. So that in the fifteenth year would make it about the year 29 A.D. that John the Baptist began his ministry.

It is interesting that he lists for us here two high priests, Annas and Caiaphas. The Jews only had one high priest at the time. However, Annas was the high priest for a period of time, around 13-14, but he was replaced by the Roman government. And there followed him three different high priests before the Roman government appointed Caiaphas as the high priest. So that Caiaphas was an appointment of Rome, whereas Annas was recognized by the people as the high priest. And he was the religious leader, where as Caiaphas was the actual high priest in those days, a political leader under the appointment of Rome. So there was this period when, oddly enough, there were two high priests. One recognized by the Jews as the legitimate, the other recognized by the Roman government as the political appointee, Caiaphas.

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Now when they arrested Jesus, they brought Him to Annas first, because He was still the power. He was the recognized power. And Caiaphas was more or less a figurehead, but the recognized power was in Annas the older, the high priest. Caiaphas was actually one of his sons.

Herod being the tetrarch of Galilee, this was Herod Antipas, and we'll come across him in just a few moments again. And so in this time,

the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness ([Luk 3:2](#)).

Now we were introduced to John last Sunday night, and to his miraculous kind of birth, as his mother and father were both of them well stricken in years. And up to this point, Elisabeth his mother had been barren. And the announcement of the angel concerning the birth of the child, who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

So now in the year 29, the word of the Lord came unto John.

And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin; as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight ([Luk 3:3-4](#)).

Now in those days when the king was to visit a certain area, there would always be couriers that would go out in advance of the king, and the couriers would tell the people, "The king is going to be visiting on such and such a day, clean up your yards, get the trash and all, all taken care of, repair the roads, and all, for the king's coming." So that when the king comes, he will see everything in a nice condition, the yard is clean, the trash is all out, and all of the roads repaired, no chuckholes or whatever, so that the king sees that everything's is going well. And so John is as a courier, telling the people, "Make your path straight, the King is coming."

Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hills shall be brought low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth ([Luk 3:5](#));

Preparing the way for the King.

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God ([Luk 3:6](#)).

This was the promise that John was giving to the people. As they were to prepare themselves, they would see God's salvation. And, of course, that was fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

Then he said to the multitude that came forth to be baptized, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ([Luk 3:7](#))

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Imagine telling that your congregation, people are coming to be converted. And you say, "Oh, you generation of vipers.

"Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Bring forth therefore fruits that are worthy of repentance ([Luk 3:8](#)),

Or that demonstrate repentance, let us see your true repentance. Not in the fact that you just being baptized, let's see it in your actions, let's see it in your changed lives.

There are many people who, upon the excitement of an emotional moment, will renounce their life of sin, will renounce their past. And will make their vows of, "I am going to be different, I am going to do better. I promise; I swear before God, I am going to be a different man." Words are cheap. John said, "Let's see the fruit of it. Let's see the changes in your life." And calling for more than just a verbal-type of a commitment, but let's see the fruit of it in the changed lives.

and don't say within yourselves, [he said] That we have Abraham as our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham ([Luk 3:8](#)).

Now this is the claim of the Jews: "We have Abraham as our father. God gave the covenant to Abraham and to his seed forever. So we are the beneficiaries of God's grace and covenant to Abraham. We have Abraham; we are the covenant people." And they rested on that relationship to Abraham. And that was an extremely important thing. In fact, to Jesus, when Jesus was challenging their lifestyles, they said, "We have Abraham as our father." It was a common saying among the Jews. As they were resting upon the covenant that God had made with Abraham and to his seed forever, and thus, recognizing that covenant they would say, "Well, we have Abraham as our father." And that was sort of to excuse any kind of a lifestyle I want to live. "Well, I have Abraham as my father, I am under the covenant, and I can live however I please." And he said, "Hey, don't try and pass off that we have Abraham as our father bit, because God is able to raise up from stones children for Abraham." And so he is calling for a true repentance, a changed life, changed actions.

And now also the ax will be laid unto the root of the trees: and every tree which does not bring forth good fruit will be caught down ([Luk 3:9](#)),

So he is calling for fruit that show repentance. Let's see the fruit of it, because every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit will be cut down.

and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? ([Luk 3:9-10](#))

And as we find his responses to the questions, we find that John was preaching a social gospel.

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He answered and said unto them, If you have two coats, give one of those to someone who doesn't have any; and if you have extra meat, do the same thing [share your abundance with the needy]. And then the tax collectors came to be baptized, and they said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you ([Luk 3:11-13](#)).

Now the tax collectors were appointees of the Roman government, and their pay was actually the excess taxes that they could collect. The Roman government had the certain standard that they had to collect. I mean that was just the tax due to Rome. But the tax collector would collect his own salary by adding to that tax. And that is why they were extremely hated by the people. They haven't found much more favor even today. Taxes are always a galling thing. But John is telling them, "Look, don't collect the extra dividends, just that which is appointed you."

And the soldiers likewise demanded, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. And as all the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he was the Messiah, or not; John answered them, saying unto them, I indeed baptize you with water; but one who is mightier than I is coming, the latched of whose shoes I am not worthy to untie: and he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable ([Luk 3:14-17](#)).

So as they are wondering, "Can this be the Messiah?" John declares unto them that he is really not the Messiah. That there is one that is coming after him who is mightier than he is. John is unworthy to untie His shoes. And though John is baptizing with water, He will baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

That baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire has been misunderstood, and as a result, we see a lot of fanaticism that is classified the baptism of fire. If a person, if a preacher in his preaching is very demonstrative, if he is shouting out his message from the top of his lungs, speaking rapidly, and sucking for air, and going on with a lot of movement and a lot of hand waving and a lot of pointing with the fingers and everything else, people say, "Man, he is really got the fire." That isn't the fire of the Holy Spirit; that can be fire of human energy, but not the fire of the Holy Spirit. So many times we see untoward type of demonstrations, usually in a violent kind of an emotional way, and people say, "Oh, oh, boy, they really got the fire." Not of the Holy Spirit.

The fire of the Holy Spirit is always a purging fire, a cleansing fire. You may want to scream, but not in excitement, but in pain, as the fire of the Holy Spirit begins to burn in your heart, because the purpose of that fire is the purging of the dross. It always has as its net result purifying. And in the context here as he speaks of Him baptizing with fire, he declares, "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor." Now this is the threshing floor.

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The fan was the large wide wooden shovel that they would take and take the wheat with the shovel, and they would throw the wheat in the air. And the wind would carry of the chaff, and the wheat would fall back down on the floor. And this was their way of threshing the wheat. Just wait for a windy day, and you go down to your threshing floor. You take what they call the fan, the big wide wooden shovel, and you just take the wheat in the wind, throw it up in the air, and the chaff would blow off, and the wheat would fall down. And you continue this process until you'd separated that little rough bran from the kernel of wheat itself.

And then he declared He will thoroughly cleanse, or purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His silo, into His garner, but He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

He, no doubt, is eluding to the first chapter of Psalms, where David talks about the blessed man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law does he meditate day and night. Who will be like a tree, planted by the river of water, bringing forth fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not withering, and whatsoever he does shall prosper. The wicked though, he said, are not so, but are like the chaff, which the wind driveth away.

So it is again a figure of purging, of cleansing, separating the chaff from the wheat. Separating the dross, the fire from the pure gold. So it is only proper that in context it is explained what is meant by the baptism of the Holy Spirit with fire.

And many other things in his exhortation he preached unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch [Herod Antipas], being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all of the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above everything else, in that he imprisoned John ([Luk 3:18-20](#)).

Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, his brother Philip ruled in the northern part of the province. He had another brother who lived in Rome. Now Herod the Great had many wives, many children. And one of his sons had a daughter named Herodias. Now the Herod who lived in Rome married his half niece Herodias, but when Herod Antipas, the character that we are dealing with in our text, went to Rome, he seduced her into marrying him, leaving his brother, marrying him, and returning with him to reign in Galilee. Which she did. So Herodias left her husband, who was also her step uncle, and she was actually a step sister-in-law to Herod Antipas, and also his step niece, but she became his wife. So it was quite an entangled situation. So your wife is also your niece and your sister-in-law. So John the Baptist dared to speak up against him. Now just didn't speak up against the rulers. But John being the type that he was, spoke out against this relationship, said, "You have no right having Herodias as your wife, that's wrong. What you did was wrong." And so as a result, Herod imprisoned John.

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Now when all of the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened ([Luk 3:21](#)),

Now Luke's gospel shows to us more than any of the other gospels the human side of Jesus. John shows us more than any of the other gospels the divine side of Jesus. But Luke points out His humanity. And because Luke is careful to point out the humanity of Jesus, he is also very careful to point out the references where Jesus was praying. And in so many cases we find Luke making mention of the fact that Jesus was praying when certain things transpired. Or before certain decisions were made. And Luke gives us a keener insight into the prayer life of Jesus than any of the other gospels. And rightly so, because of his emphasis upon the human side of the nature of Jesus. And so it is only Luke's gospel that points out the fact that Jesus was praying when He was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. That as He was baptized, He was praying, and the heavens were opened.

And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased ([Luk 3:22](#)).

And so again, we find the tri-unity of God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Jesus, the Son of God, being baptized; the Holy Spirit descending upon Him; and the voice of the Father declaring, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased."

Now there are those people who are known as "Jesus Only." You don't run across many of them here in California, they are often called "The United Pentecostals." There is an awful lot of them back in the southern states, and quite a group of them in Arizona, "The United Pentecostal Church," or they take some even longer titles, "The United Pentecostal Church in Jesus' Name," and different titles. But their chief doctrinal difference is their belief that Jesus is the Father, He is the Holy Spirit, He is the Son, there is only one, and that is Jesus, it's Jesus only. It's interesting to bring up this particular verse to them, to hear double talk.

When Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, where did the voice come from? When the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," was Jesus practicing ventriloquism? And they really can dig a hole for themselves on this particular verse. And it's fun; I do it to tease them every once in a while, watch them dig their hole.

Now Jesus at this point was about thirty years old. How long John was baptizing before Jesus came, we are not informed.

But Jesus at this point being about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the [and this should read,] son-in-law of Heli ([Luk 3:23](#)),

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For here we obviously have the genealogy of Mary and not of Joseph. In Matthew's gospel we have the genealogy of Joseph. And in Matthew's gospel the genealogy begins not with Adam, but with Abraham coming down through David, and from David through Solomon, coming to Jesus Christ. Now here we start with Jesus, and we go back to Adam, not to Abraham. But we go all the way back to Adam. Now you'll find that the genealogy between Abraham and David is the same. However, in the genealogy here in Luke, rather than coming through Solomon, it comes through Nathan, Solomon's older brother. And we come to Mary, the mother of Jesus, Joseph, the son-in-law of Heli.

Now why would we have two genealogies for Jesus differing? And if Joseph isn't the father of Jesus, then what is the value of putting Joseph's genealogy in the record? If He was born of the virgin Mary, I can understand Mary's genealogy. Let it be said that the person's genealogy was an important document in that person's life among the Jews. God had a special purpose for the Jewish nation. That special purpose was that they were to bring the Messiah into the world. And thus, as God established His covenant with them, and His law, He incorporated within that law and within that covenant a very close guarding of the race itself. And the prohibitions against inner racial marriages, because God was seeking to keep a line from Abraham and David to the Messiah. For anyone to declare themselves to be the Messiah they must prove that they are descendents of Abraham, and descendents of David, because God promised to both Abraham, and to David that from their seed the nations of the world would be blessed.

God said to David, "I will build thee a house, and there will always be one sitting upon the throne." And He was referring to the Messiah. So that the Messiah has to be able to prove His blood line.

Now there in the time of the return from the captivity in Babylon, Ezra and Nehemiah, there were certain men who said, "Well, we're of the house of Levi, we want to exercise the office of the priesthood." And so they said, "Alright, show us your genealogy." And these fellows were unable to produce their genealogies. They had been lost in Babylon. And because they could not produce their genealogies proving that they were of the tribe of Levi, they were not allowed into the priesthood. Only those that could bring out their genealogy, and prove that they were from the tribe of Levi. And so it was an extremely important thing to those people to maintain the records, the family records of their genealogies, in order that they might prove what family, what line they came from. It was especially important for the Messiah.

Now it would immediately put a disclaimer upon anyone today claiming to be the Messiah, because no one today has their records that can take them back to Abraham and David. So anyone who would come along saying, "I am the Messiah" would have no ability to prove that claim, inasmuch, there are no more records that would trace them back through Abraham and David.

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Now why Joseph's genealogy? If you notice, Joseph's genealogy comes through Solomon and the kingly line. So that it brings you down to Jesus from the line of Solomon, and the kingly line showing that Jesus as the adopted son, the eldest adopted son of Joseph, had right to the title to the king of Israel. As the oldest adopted son of Joseph. But as the son of Mary, coming through Nathan, who was the older brother of Solomon, Nathan was the legal heir of David. And so through Mary He received His legal heirship through David. But through the adopted sonship of Joseph He received the kingly right.

Now during the later part of the time of the kings in Judea, in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 22, because of the wickedness of the king Jeconiah, God placed a curse upon him, and this curse that God placed upon Jeconiah precluded any of his descendants taking the throne in Israel. The last verse of [Jeremiah 22](#), "Thus saith the Lord, 'Write ye (concerning Jeconiah) this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.'" From Jeconiah it was cut off. And none of his sons sat upon the throne. And from this word of the Lord, none of his descendants could sit upon the throne.

Now if you will read the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew, you will find out he was a descendant of Jeconiah. So he could not sit upon the throne. If He were from the bloodline of Jeconiah, the actual son of Joseph, but being the adopted son of Joseph, and yet, the son of Mary through Nathan and David, He had the legal claim to the house of David. Plus He could take and sit upon the throne as the eldest son of Joseph, yet not be of the seed of Jeconiah. So it's fascinating that God would put both records in, so He can sit as the King, because He is the adopted eldest son of Joseph, but He also has the legal right, because He is the son of Mary, virgin-born.

So Luke gives us that genealogy through Mary and gives the names of all these people, and we are not going to go through them. But it is interesting that he goes all the way back to Adam, so that is where Matthew relates Him only to the Jewish race, Luke relates Him to the world. Because we are all descendants of Adam. So all of us are related to Jesus, as Luke makes the relationship of Jesus to the world, and thus, we can each one identify being Jew or Gentile, because He comes basically from Adam. We all relate to Him and can relate to Him.