

Luke 3

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Why God desires Christians testify about Jesus?

One of the questions Christians ponder is "I'm saved, now what?" We get that God desires that we use our lives for His glory, but specifically what does He want us to do? I know we've got responsibilities to deal with, but what does He expect of us while we're dealing with that, as well as our spare time? As I state constantly, God doesn't call us to quit our lives wear a sandwich board to say Jesus is God! The question comes back to how do we be a witness for Jesus, and still do what we need to do? That leads me to Luke 3, mostly a bunch of names that none of us would even think about or consider (except for Jesus and John the Baptist). These names aren't for us memorize, but to realize all them including John the Baptist (JTB) point to Jesus to testify who He is and why He came to earth!

OK John, we get why Jesus came and most of us use our lives in some capacity to make a difference to honor Him with our lives! My question is, like those "others" in this chapter, Jesus wants us to use our lives to testify about who He is. I realize most of us are public about our faith! The question remains if we are asked to testify about Jesus, would we? Would we risk embarrassment or "losing face" to stand up for what we believe is the truth about eternity? Yes, it can be embarrassing and can cost us our lives as it did for John the Baptist as we'll see in this text. This chapter has a bunch of ordinary people who'd disappear in the analogs of history if not for the fact they existed around the time of Jesus or the names of those in his lineage (listed in this chapter) also point to the key moment in history. What I'm getting at is if we want to live as He desires, it means using our lives to point to Him, as that is why He created us in the first place.

With that out of my system, time for details. As I mentioned, this chapter begins with a bunch of non-Jewish names in essence to date the time John the Baptist started on the scene. Remember the modern calendar did not exist then so the writer is doing his best for those living when he wrote this to date the time John the Baptist came on the scene and Jesus began his ministry. Why? For starters, Jesus stated that JTB (using that abbreviation for the rest of this lesson) was called the greatest man to live by Jesus prior to Jesus being on the scene, see Luke 7:28). JTB had the privilege to be the first to lead people to Jesus! Most of the names given in this chapter teach us what JTB had to deal with! There is no quiz in heaven on every Bible name. We'll be judged on how we used our lives to make a difference for Him!

OK onto the first of several "name discussions" in this chapter. The underlying point is JTB dealt with people who for the most part didn't care about their relationship with God. JTB was sent in that setting which in essence means if JTB could "do that", what excuse do we have? With that understood Luke's opening paragraph lists key leaders from the Roman Emperor to rulers in Israel when John the Baptist's ministry started. One reason was to date JTB's starting time (about 26 to 28AD). Another reason is to show the corruption that existed when John started his ministry. The Roman Emperor Tiberius was key in that the Sea of Galilee was renamed to the Sea of Tiberius to honor him! In Chapter 3, I talked about Herod the Great who if you didn't know was from Edom, part of Jordan today. He ruled Israel to 4BC. After that, Israel was divided into 4 parts for his descendants to rule. Due to corruption, Jerusalem was then ruled by Pontius Pilate, a Roman appointee. Then the chapter gives us the name of the high priest. Think of the movie "The Godfather" as the Jewish priests were corrupt. Annas was the "The Godfather behind the scenes", and Caiaphas was one of his sons who was high priest at that time. Realize JTB did work at a date and location known for being corrupt! If JTB could work then, what excuse do we have to not be a witness for Jesus?

Then Luke quotes Isaiah to describe JTB's ministry. Luke does not give a lot of Old Testament quotes and realize he's not Jewish. I suspect he got a copy of an Isaiah scroll (Greek translation) and he wrote from there. The point is JTB was literally a fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and even a non-Jewish man like Luke can appreciate that God was working through history to point to Jesus!

From there, JTB started insulting Jewish people who thought they were above being baptized. Realize that in Judaism baptism is only for converts. JTB was chewing them out calling them snakes, (it refers to garden of Eden snake descendants). One of the common New Testament themes is salvation is only about accepting Jesus free payment for sins. Works is how we prove our lives act on that! From there, JTB even gives examples to those coming to be baptized both Jewish and non-Jewish people. JTB tells people to share. It is not a call for socialism, but just kindness. He tells tax collectors and soldiers just to do what they're called to do and not cheat! Both those professions were hated by Israelites for being traitors, and JTB never says for them to quit, just do what they're commanded to do as part of their job! Notice JTB doesn't quote the 10 Commandments, but focuses on practical things for them, like being a good witness for God based on how one acts practically!

I admit I wondered why JTB was so popular. Part of it is the Israelites wanted a Messiah to overthrow Rome. I pictured JTB preaching by the Jordan River, away from people. Shepherds spotted him and it grew from there (just my theory). Anyway, people thought he might be the Messiah, so JTB had to set the record straight and say in effect he wasn't worthy to tie Jesus' sandal laces! The key point is JTB is aware Jesus is God and JTB (like us) are called to use our lives to lead people to Him!

From there Luke jumps out of time sequence to state how JTB was killed by one of the Herod's. I'll add that this Herod was corrupt, among other things by stealing his brother's wife! JTB called him out on it and it cost JTB his life. An underlying point is being a good witness for Jesus does NOT mean rewards in this life, but in the next one!

Then comes the famous scene of JTB baptizing Jesus. Obviously, Jesus was sinless, so why? So Jesus can pay the price for our sins: He's identifying with the sins of humanity, and the public demonstration of the baptism is to identify why He came in the world! Bottom line, God made it obvious that Jesus is the one to be called for that purpose.

The chapter ends with a genealogy of Jesus going back to Adam. Why? To show he was really a man as well as fully God. A classic discussion is the genealogy in Matthew is a little different than the one here in Luke. Matthew's gospel goes through the kings descended from David. Here in Luke, we get a different son from David than King Solomon. Two theories: one is Joseph had two fathers, one he was born to and another one who legally adopted him to become his father. The other theory is Luke gives us Mary's descendants and Joseph's listed as the adopted father. Either way works. Joseph became the legal father of Jesus by both Jewish and Roman adoption laws. Those laws essentially say all the bride owns now becomes the legal possession of the husband upon marriage including her children.

So why does Luke give this? The goal is to have people be a witness for Jesus. By proving Jesus was a legitimate descendant of King David (See 2nd Samuel 7:14), it's one way of showing he was of the line of King David and fully human from Adam and Eve! There was also a curse God put on an Israel king (for being wicked) and the virgin birth was necessary to get around that curse! (See Jeremiah 22:30).

In summary God shows us that we like John and those he baptized were called to be a witness for Jesus no matter the cost!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.