

*The unfolding of your words gives light.*

## To Seek and to Save

### *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*

<sup>3:1</sup> Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene<sup>a</sup>, <sup>2</sup>in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas<sup>b</sup>, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness<sup>c</sup>. <sup>3</sup>And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins<sup>d</sup>; <sup>4</sup>as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

<sup>a</sup> **3:1 in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene.** This list of characters is important in giving context to the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry. Here is why:

- Tiberius Caesar: Tiberius was an effective military general who took power after the death of Augustus (see note on Luke 2:1) and ruled Rome from A.D. 14 until his death in A.D. 37. Luke's timeline places the beginning of John's ministry around A.D. 29.
- Pontius Pilate: Pilate was appointed governor in Judea and served in that capacity from around A.D. 26-A.D. 37. While there is little documentation of his life before he came to power, he is best known for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee: This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who was manipulated into beheading John the Baptist. Luke recorded the historical account of Herod's death in Acts 12:20-23.
- Philip the Tetrarch of Ituraea: Philip was another son of Herod the Great and the half brother of Herod Antipas. He married his great-niece Salome, the daughter of his niece Herodias and a half-brother also named Philip.
- Lysanias the Tetrarch of Abilene: Skeptics have argued that this character was killed by Mark Antony many years earlier. It is possible, given Luke's eye for detail, that Lysanias was a dynastic title or that another man of that name had assumed the position before the ministry of John began.

<sup>b</sup> **3:2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.** Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas (John 18:13). The high priesthood was more for sale than for the sons of Aaron in the days of John and Jesus.

<sup>c</sup> **3:2 the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.** Luke introduces John by showing us the dark backdrop of corrupt secular and religious leaders of his day.

This is the way prophets are called to serve. "The word of the Lord" comes to them. Here are some noteworthy examples:

- Abraham (Genesis 15:1)
- Samuel (1 Samuel 15:10)
- Nathan (2 Samuel 7:4)
- Gad (2 Samuel 24:11)
- The man of God from Judah who prophesied against Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1)
- Jehu (1 Kings 16:1)
- Elijah (1 Kings 17:2, 8; 18:1; 19:9)

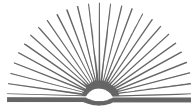
<sup>d</sup> **3:3 he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** The primary command of the apostles was "Repent!" It was not baptism that resulted in forgiveness. It was repentance that resulted in forgiveness. This is demonstrated

*The Gospel of Luke  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.*

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible<sup>®</sup>, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.



*The unfolding of your words gives light.*

“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,  
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,  
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT’<sup>a</sup>.  
<sup>5</sup>‘EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED,  
AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW;  
THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT,  
AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH’<sup>b</sup>;  
<sup>6</sup>AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD’<sup>c</sup>.<sup>”d</sup>

---

by the next section of this text where he refused baptism to those who did not show the fruit of repentance.

<sup>a</sup> 3:4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “**THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’** John was mistaken for Messiah, but John the apostle (John 1:19-23) records John’s denial. He basically said, “I’m not Messiah. I’m a voice.” John was the voice prophesied by Isaiah that called the people to turn from their sins and to their Rescuer.

<sup>b</sup> 3:5 **EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH.** This is certainly figurative speech, but it points to the mountain-moving change Messiah would bring to the earth.

<sup>c</sup> 3:6 **AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.** God’s saving character was about to be shown again. Jesus is the salvation of God. The message of Jesus brings the salvation of God.

<sup>d</sup> 3:1-6 Luke’s portrayal of the foremost political figures in the Middle East when John lived in the wilderness does more than give us the time he began to preach. It sets Rome’s power plays and treachery as the backdrop for the effective ministry of a humble man whose primary weapon was preaching. That God would bring powerful change through the preaching of His word has been shown by the way powerful rulers have persecuted preachers through the centuries. This same John lost his head because he dared to proclaim the truth about the sins of a nation in general and Herod’s immorality in particular.

We complain about the corruption and weakness of our political and religious leaders, but God often shows Himself strong during the darkest days. Rather than assuming our best weapon in this fight is getting one of our own in high office, we need to embrace what Paul taught in the Corinthian church:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Earlier Paul told the same church,

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. 1 Corinthians 1:21

God’s weapon is the simple, straightforward proclamation of His truth. We call it preaching. Here are several reasons why you ought to value and give heed to the preaching of God’s word:

1. Preaching is the way, in God’s providence, a small portion of His timeless revelation intersects with current events.
2. Preaching is a primary way God shows you your sins. When John the Baptist told Herod Antipas that the ruler should not have taken his brother’s wife, he was not judging. He was relaying a judgment God had already made.
3. Preaching is God’s tool for cultural change. Who could have guessed what Truth would do when Moses took it to Egypt, Daniel took it to Babylon or when Paul took it to Rome?

The Gospel of Luke  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.



*The unfolding of your words gives light.*

- 
4. Preaching is God's chosen way to communicate the gospel. We ought to value the preaching of God's word because that is His way of advancing His kingdom.

The Gospel of Luke  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

©Rice Lake Baptist Church, 104 East Barker Street, Rice Lake, Wisconsin, 54868 – <http://www.ricelakebaptist.org> – 715.234.1966

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and that you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.