

Sunday, January 8, 2023 | Onward

Week 2 | Luke 3 | "The First Steps of Jesus' Ministry"

On January 1, Pastor Bob kicked off the first sermon series of 2023 entitled "Onward." This series will explore the so-called "firsts" of Jesus' life and how he pressed onward into new and unexplored territories. Like the rocket, which took astronauts to the moon in 1969 had a launching point, Jesus' ministry also had a starting part. And just like the Saturn V eventually took humanity to a place it had never been before, Jesus took humanity into a more profound and closer relationship with God than it had ever experienced before. The final spiritual frontier would be conquered by none other than God's only Son, and, amazingly, he would invite us to join him on the journey.

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Thus, having already explored Jesus' *first words*, we'll move forward to the *first steps* of Jesus' earthly ministry. Technically, Jesus has already walked the face of the earth for thirty years by Luke 3; however, it is here that he truly *begins* his earthly ministry (cf. Lu. 3:23). And while John the Baptist holds the spotlight for most of the chapter, it is Jesus who steals the show right at the close of the scene. But far from diminishing the importance of John's work, Jesus' arrival highlights everything John said and did. Jesus' baptism by this camel-skin-wearing-locus-eating-prophet is the very capstone of John's ministry. This was the moment for which he had been born, and with Jesus' coming, John's work was all but finished. Were he alive today, John would've been honored that the close of his ministry coincided with the first few steps of humanity's Messiah.

**READ:** Luke 3 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup>during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup>As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup>and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

<sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

<sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, 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. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. <sup>19</sup> But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup> added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

<sup>23</sup> Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, <sup>24</sup> the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, <sup>25</sup> the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, <sup>26</sup> the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, <sup>27</sup> the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of

Neri, <sup>28</sup> the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, <sup>29</sup> the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, <sup>30</sup> the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, <sup>31</sup> the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, <sup>32</sup> the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, <sup>33</sup> the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, <sup>34</sup> the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, <sup>35</sup> the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, <sup>36</sup> the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, <sup>37</sup> the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, <sup>38</sup> the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

The passage shows us three things:

**i. John wanted his people to receive the Messiah (vs. 1-14).**

After situating the scene in its highly complex socio-political climate with the mention of seven different names—a veritable cornucopia of both Roman and Israeli rulers smashed together—Luke tells us that John the Baptist received a “word from the Lord.” Apparently, this message from God called him to leave the wilderness behind him and come preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness via the mode of baptism.

As we discussed during the sermon entitled “Church Ordinance: Baptism” in late October last year, while similar to our own, John’s baptism is different than the kind we practice today.<sup>1</sup> John’s baptism was for the purpose of preparing a people to receive the Messiah, whereas, ours is for the purpose of identifying that a people have received the Messiah already. In other words, people were baptized by John in anticipation of Jesus’ coming, while people get baptized today in recognition that Jesus has already come and taken up residence in their hearts. The Israelites got baptized to be forgiven. We get baptized because we are forgiven. In this way, it is important to note John’s baptism is inferior to the baptisms which followed the resurrection. In fact, Paul encountered people who had been baptized under John but not under Christ in Acts 19. Amazingly, he actually had to re-baptize them in the name of Jesus to complete the work that John had started.

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<sup>1</sup> Hyrne, Ben, *Church Ordinance: Baptism*, October 30, 2022, Upon This Rock, Grace Pointe Baptist Church, <https://www.gracepointelife.com/sermons/upon-this-rock/>, [accessed, January 6, 2023].

However, setting aside the type of baptism we practice today, the point of John's ministry was to prepare his people for the Messiah's arrival. But how was he to do that? Luke quotes Isaiah 40 when explaining John's ministry when he says that he was to "make" every crooked path straight, "fill" every valley, level every "mountain," and smooth out every "rough" place. This, of course, is not referring to some literal construction project. John was not building a road but a people. And the way you "make" every crooked path straight, "fill" every valley, level every "mountain," and smooth out every "rough" place in a person's life is via repentance.

Repentance acknowledges a mistake and removes the roadblocks in a life so that the Messiah might have unobstructed access to a person's heart (cf. Lu. 3:1-14). Only when we confess our sins does God have room to work. Thus, confession is indeed good for the soul. How else can we grow if we do not remove the impediments to growth? A farmer only feeds the birds if he does not pull the weeds and dislodge the stones before throwing the seed. Repentance without the fruits of repentance isn't really repentance. And though repentance may be a prayer, it's a one-time decision that leads to a lifetime alteration. A change of behavior is evidence of a changed heart.

Interestingly, John builds up Israel by preaching a sermon that is not very seeker-friendly either. It would make even the most ferocious fire and brimstone preacher recoil. He begins by calling his audience a "brood of vipers" and imploring them to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance." This he said, warning them because there was a coming "wrath" that not even the children of Abraham would be safe. In fact, God's judgment will begin at the house of God. So, John tells them, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees," and any "tree" that is not producing "good fruit" will be "cut down and thrown into the fire." Time was up. The King was coming. The Israelites had to get their life in order.

Apparently, John was preaching to a pretty diverse audience. Luke tells us that three classes of people respond. The first is the nondescript masses who ask him what they should do to repent. John responds by telling them to be charitable—i.e., give clothes and food to those in need. The second people to respond was, surprisingly, a bunch of politicians called "tax collectors." John tells this group to be equitable in the dealings—i.e., take only what they're supposed to take. The final group to respond to John's preaching was even more surprising than the politicians. Amazingly, some soldiers asked the prophet what they were to do to prove their repentance. John tells this group to be civil—i.e., don't abuse their authority, act by the law, and be content.

ii. **John wanted his people to recognize the Messiah (vs. 15-22).**

Now, John's preaching so stirred the hearts of his listeners that they began wondering if he was the very one who would actually deliver them. In other words, they thought John was the Messiah. How does the Baptizer respond? John ***emphatically*** disagreed. He knew he was not the Messiah and so went to great pains to distinguish himself from the One who was to come. He would tell anyone who asked him that his baptism was ***inferior*** to the Messiah's; because, as he only used "water," the coming Lord would use the "Holy Spirit" and "fire." This meant that, unlike John's baptism (which ***could not*** truly save anyone), the Messiah's baptism would do one of two things: it would either ***imbue believers*** with God's own Spirit if they accepted him, or it would ***obliterate unbelievers*** with an "unquenchable" blaze. This way, the so-called "wheat" would be separated from the "chaff." The former would be safe and secure in the barn, while the latter would be used for kindling.

Thus, John was the junior, and the Messiah was the senior. He would not have the Israelites to be confused when Jesus came, so he would constantly draw people's attention away from himself and onto the horizon.

Luke then pauses the narrative and gives us a glimpse into John's future. While many received his word, repented, and were baptized, not everyone liked John's message. Luke tells us about John's trouble with Herod, who, among many other deplorable things, put the Baptizer in prison for condemning his marriage to his sister-in-law. But, after that, Luke returns to the shores of the Jordan, where we find Jesus—the Messiah—being baptized himself. Ironically, as if in deference to John's own wishes, Luke focuses the narrative entirely on Jesus at this point and the prophet, who had been the leading actor, completely disappears from the stage.

**iii. Luke wants his readers to realize John's Messiah is God's Son (vs. 23-38).**

It's important to note that of the two genealogies given for Jesus, neither is complete. Matthew omits three generations (cf. 1 Chron. 3:10-15; Mat. 1:17)<sup>2</sup> and Luke omits all of the Davidic rulers, save Zerubbabel and Shealtiel; he even leaves out the famous King Solomon.<sup>3</sup> And there are several theories for why the authors did this. The simplest explanation is that Matthew presents Joseph's lineage, and Luke presents Mary's lineage. But, as is immediately apparent, there is a significant problem with this theory in that Mary is not named. Interestingly, Christians were obsessed with solving this conundrum in the centuries following the first. And they came up with varied and viable solutions, each as believable as the next. All

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<sup>2</sup> General Editors, "Jesus & Genealogies: Hope Has Arrived," 2018, *The Bible Project*, <https://bibleproject.com/blog/jesus-genealogies/>, [accessed, January 20, 2023].

<sup>3</sup> Lanier, Gregory R., "Does the Bible Contain Contradicting Genealogies of Jesus?", May 23, 2022, *Ligonier Ministries*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/genealogies-of-jesus>, [accessed, January 20, 2023].

told, 2,000 years of research regarding this problem has demonstrated that the gospel writers were ***intentional*** in their omissions and not simply ***incompetent***, as is sometimes claimed by critics of the Bible. For the sake of time and under the guidance of 1 Timothy 1:4, I will not unpack this issue. For the vast majority of Christians, there is very little to be gleaned from that sort of discussion.

However, comparing the two genealogies reveals three important things that make Luke's lineage distinct.<sup>4</sup> ***First***, genealogies usually come at the very beginning, not partway through. Luke does this because he's making a case about Christ's parentage. ***Second***, they typically go past to present, not present to past, as in Luke. The key figure in God's plan is Jesus. And just as John did, Luke begins with Jesus. And, ***lastly***, unlike Matthew, who goes as far back as Abraham, Luke goes even further back in time to Adam and God.<sup>5</sup> Though he was assumed to be Joseph's son, Jesus was, in fact, the immediate descendent of God.

And this last point (Jesus is God's Son) is Luke's point. He wanted to show that, since Adam, there had been a long line of progeny who came and went. And since Adam, humanity has followed a pattern of birth, life, and death. One father transmitted their likeness onto their son, and then that son passed on his likeness to their son, and so on and so forth (i.e., kidney stones due to diet vs. genetics). But of the countless children that have existed since the foundation of the world, only ***two*** were directly and immediately descended from God: Adam and Jesus.

But why? Why would our author need to make this point? Because just as all of humanity can trace its lineage back to Adam, all of the "new humanity" can trace its lineage back to Jesus. Luke's lineage not only establishes Jesus as a descendent of Adam (He was, after all, born from a Mary who was herself a daughter of Adam. He was not only a Jew but, broadly, he was human.<sup>6</sup>), but also, this genealogy establishes a new lineage, a divine lineage akin to the old one yet still distinct. And Jesus' family line is special because, unlike Adam's, it would not be characterized by death but ***life***. Jesus stands in solidarity with both man and God.<sup>7</sup> Paul explained it like this:

**READ: Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)**

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<sup>4</sup> General Editors, "Why are Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke so different?", January 4, 2022, *Got Questions*, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-genealogy.html>, [accessed, January 20, 2023].

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 350.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—<sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

<sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. <sup>16</sup> And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. <sup>17</sup> For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Jesus, God made an entirely new creation; one could even say a wholly new species whose destiny would be tied to Jesus rather than Adam. Because we are the direct descendent of Adam, we were connected to his fate. This is why we have a sinful nature. This is why we die. A father passes on his traits to his children, and so because Adam sinned, so we all sin. But, like Adam, Jesus is also a direct descendent of God. And all who would be "born again" by believing in Jesus (cf. Jhn. 3:1-8) become a descendent of Jesus and will be given a new destiny. And just as we all received the consequences of Adam's disobedience to God—i.e., sin and death, those who believe in Jesus will receive the consequence of Jesus' obedience to God—i.e., righteousness and life.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

Through the Son of God, the sons (and daughters) of Adam are given a new lineage.

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

## Video Description

Onward | Week 2 | “The First Steps of Jesus’ Earthly Ministry”

TEXT: Luke 3

Thus, having already explored Jesus’ **first words**, we’ll move forward to the **first steps** of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Technically, Jesus has already walked the face of the earth for thirty years by Luke 3; however, it is here that he truly **begins** his earthly ministry (cf. Lu. 3:23). And while John the Baptist holds the spotlight for most of the chapter, it is Jesus who steals the show right at the close of the scene. But far from diminishing the importance of John’s work, Jesus’ arrival highlights everything John said and did. Jesus’ baptism by this camel-skin-wearing-locus-eating-prophet is the very capstone of John’s ministry. This was the moment for which he had been born, and with Jesus’ coming, John’s work was all but finished. Were he alive today, John would’ve been honored that the close of his ministry coincided with the first few steps of humanity’s Messiah.

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: