

**[1]**  
***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is***  
***Lights in a Dark World***  
***Luke 3:1-18***  
**April 22, 2018, Jeff Germon**

Last week we looked at the birth of John the Baptist and the circumstances surrounding that event as told by the Gospel writer, Luke. Luke was a doctor and a meticulous historian. So, his Gospel account has quite a bit more historical detail than the other Gospel writers. He very carefully set up the context into which the narrative of John the Baptist and Jesus took place.

Today we are going to take a look at the life and ministry of John the Baptist. As I said last week, John was a relative, possibly a cousin, of Jesus. John was born just six months before Jesus. So, the historical context Luke details for John's birth is the same context into which Jesus was born. Luke sets this up beautifully. He describes for us who was in power in Rome and the governance structure for Judea and Galilee as well as who the high priest was. That information can tell us a lot.

**[2]**

**Luke 3:1–18 (NLT)**

***<sup>1</sup> It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. <sup>2</sup> Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.***

Let's walk through these first couple verses and set the scene.

**[3]**

**Tiberius** was the reluctant emperor of the Roman Empire at this time. He reigned from 14 to 37 AD. Most historians believe Jesus was born between 6 and 4 BC, so Tiberius would have taken office when Jesus was in his late teens and he remained in power until just a few years after Jesus' crucifixion.

Tiberius was the stepson of Caesar Augustus. He really did not want the title or the job of being king. It was his mother who pushed for him to be emperor. He had been a very successful Roman army general and very unwillingly accepted the title of Emperor. He hated governing and left most of the decisions of governance to his ministers who ruled with absolute ruthless and tyrannical authority.

Because of his disdain for his position he exiled himself to the Isle of Capri so he would be far away from the hub of governance in Rome.

**[4]**

Next Luke names **Pontius Pilate** as governor of Judea. Pilate was a Roman who was appointed by Tiberius to govern Judea and it was he who reluctantly authorized the crucifixion of Jesus. He reigned from 26 to 36 AD.

**[5]**

**Herod Antipas**, Herod the Great's son, was ruler of Galilee. His father was the paranoid, puppet king that Tiberius' father, Caesar Augustus, put in charge of Judea. Herod Antipas' father was the one who killed all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem because of the news that the Messiah would be born there. When Herod the Great died in 4 BC Caesar Augustus divided up the kingdom between Herod's three sons, Herod Antipas, Herod Archelaus, and Herod Philip.

It was Herod Antipas who was the Herod most often referred to in the Gospels and the book of Acts. He wasn't actually a king, as the Bible refers to him. He was a tetrarch, which was a ruler with monarchical powers over a portion of the Empire under the authority of the Emperor. They were basically puppet kings.

Herod Antipas was a cruel and very ambitious man with a lust for power, just like his father before him. He was very pro-Roman but was not liked by the Romans. That led to some very interesting dynamics.

Antipas, like his father, sponsored a massive building campaign. He built a new capital city called Tiberius on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. That move was very offensive to Jews because their holy capital was Jerusalem. Add to that the fact that he built his new capital on the site of a famous graveyard, which meant that if a Jew entered the city they would become ritually unclean and would have to go through a purification before they could go to the Temple.

Herod divorced his wife, Areta, and married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, who was also his niece. John the Baptist vociferously spoke up against the marriage claiming that it was adulterous. Herodias hated John because he publicly shamed her and she eventually talked her husband into arresting John.

Some of you may remember the account in Mark 6 when Herod was so taken by his step daughter Salome's dancing at a party he held that he offered her anything she wished, up to half his kingdom. Salome's mother encouraged her to ask for John the Baptist's head.

After Luke lists these governing rulers he says that ***Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.***  
[6]

There really can only be one high priest, so it is unusual that Luke has two high priests listed. Annas was high priest from AD 6 to AD 15 when the Roman Prefect Valerius Gratus, who was in office before Pontius Pilate, deposed him. His son in law Caiaphas replaced him, but Annas, to most of the Jews, was the rightful high priest. So, even though he was not the official high priest, he still had considerable influence. It was Annas, in John 18, who began the proceedings in Jesus' trial before Caiaphas took over officially.

As I said last week, the religious system at that time was corrupt, for the most part, and it was powerful. John the Baptist and Jesus didn't pull any punches when it came to speaking against the corruption. The high priests were powerful men who wielded their power to dominate, coerce and shame the average Jew.

So, that was Luke's introduction to John the Baptist.

[7]  
***<sup>2</sup> At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness.***

***<sup>2</sup> At this time...*** It was at this time, when the culture was so corrupt, socially, politically and religiously, that John began his ministry. Luke thought it was very important to be clear about the socio/political and religious context into which John the Baptist began his ministry. We'll see why as we continue to read this passage.

***<sup>3</sup> Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.***

[8]  
***<sup>4</sup> Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him!' <sup>5</sup> The valleys will be filled, and the mountains and hills made level. The curves will be straightened, and the rough places made smooth. <sup>6</sup> And then all people will see the salvation sent from God.' "***

[9]  
***<sup>7</sup> When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?..."***

Luke doesn't mention this, but Matthew does in his Gospel; John didn't direct these comments to the whole crowd. He aimed those very harsh words at the Pharisees and Sadducees who just came to watch the show.

[10]  
**Matthew 3:7 (NLT)**

***<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?”***

John was not a people pleaser — obviously. And I’m almost positive he hadn’t taken the Dale Carnegie “How to Make Friends and Influence People” course, because I’m sure that Dale Carnegie would likely say this is not a great way to make friends. But, John the Baptist’s main goal was not to make friends with hypocritical self-righteous play actors who wouldn’t listen. John was very clear that his job was to sound a wake up call to people who were spiritually blind and point them to Jesus. He singled out these overly religious people who typically had their noses in the air judging everyone. Both John and Jesus reserved their harshest words for the self-righteous religious leaders.

**[11]**

***<sup>8</sup> Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.***

**[12]**

***<sup>9</sup> Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”***

Those are some pretty harsh words. Jesus also reserved his harshest words for self-righteous religious people. Why? Because it’s the self-righteousness of the overly religious people that keeps them from God. They think they are safe because they are Baptist, or Pentecostal, or Lutheran, or Catholic or whatever. They think they are safe if they adhere to their system of belief. John demolished that shaky foundation.

***“...every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”***

John continued:

**[13]**

***<sup>10</sup> The crowds asked, “What should we do?” <sup>11</sup> John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”***

**[14]**

***<sup>12</sup> Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup> He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”***

The tax collectors were Jews hired by the Roman government to collect taxes from their own people. The Jews hated them more than any other people because they would collect extra to line their own pockets.

***<sup>14</sup> “What should we do?” asked some soldiers. John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”***

Here we have some Roman soldiers. These were not Jews at all. They were coming to be baptized by John too. John’s preaching was hard hitting and pointed. There was no heart his arrows did not aim at. His was a very direct call to repentance.

To repent means to turn. It was a military term that meant an about face, to turn around. To make a 180 degree turn from a self-centred life of sin, to a life that was moving towards the heart of God. But John got even more specific.

**[15]**

***<sup>15</sup> Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah.***

John was *the* most popular speaker in his day. Think about some of your favourite preachers. Some of you listen to podcasts or watch speakers on TV, or read their blogs and their books. People flock to their

churches. Back in the day, when I was growing up Chuck Swindol was the most popular preacher and Christian author. He was asked to start a new church in Texas. The opening day was announced and there was an instant mega church from day one. People flocked to hear him preach.

That was what it was like with John the Baptist. There was a buzz on the streets. Hundreds and, perhaps, thousands of people flocked to listen to him preach. People wanted to know if John was the Messiah. And actually, the Gospel writer, John, said that it was some Pharisees who were sent by their leaders to find answers as to who John was and why he thought he had the right to baptize. That prompted John the Baptist to point to Jesus as Messiah.

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***<sup>16</sup> John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals.***

[17]

***He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>17</sup> He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” <sup>18</sup> John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.***

[18]

**John was chosen, born and called by God for one purpose and that was to point people to Jesus. It was the reason he existed. He knew that and he didn’t get distracted from that purpose.**

We don’t have time to read it now, but read John 1 is about the relationship between John and Jesus. I’ll just read three verses from there. Just to be clear, the writer of the Gospel of John is a different person than John the Baptist. The Gospel writer was one of Jesus’ twelve disciples.

[19]

**John 1:6-8 (NLT)**

***<sup>6</sup> God sent a man, John the Baptist, <sup>7</sup> to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.***

John’s entire life was about pointing to Jesus. John’s ministry began before Jesus’, but it didn’t take long before Jesus’ popularity eclipsed John’s. If John wasn’t clear on his purpose this would have been a problem. But he was extremely clear on what he was sent to do. Let’s take a look at an account in the Gospel of John that shows just how clear John was about his call.

[20]

**John 3:22–36 (NLT)**

***<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people. <sup>23</sup> At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism.***

[21]

***<sup>24</sup> (This was before John was thrown into prison.) <sup>25</sup> A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. <sup>26</sup> So John’s disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us.”***

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***<sup>27</sup> John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ <sup>29</sup> It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom’s friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success.***

[23]

***<sup>30</sup> He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. <sup>31</sup> “He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. <sup>32</sup> He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them!***

***[24]***

***<sup>33</sup> Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. <sup>36</sup> And anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.”***

So, John was very clear about who he was and who he wasn’t, which gave clarity to what he would say ‘yes’ to and what he would say ‘no’ to. His job was to point people to Jesus, the Messiah. He knew that he had to fade into the background when Jesus came into the picture.

Every follower of Jesus has the same call on their lives. Our main goal in life should be to point people to Jesus by how we live, and what we say.

Let’s think about how Luke began his introduction to the ministry of John the Baptist. He described the socio/political and religious milieu. It was a mess. It was far more chaotic and scary for a follower of Jesus at that time than it is for us in the world we live in in Campbell River.

That said, we do live in a very interesting time. It really is hard standing out today as a follower of Jesus. There are some things that we hold to be true that would cause most of our world to single us out and call us haters.

I’d like to talk about some of these things because we need to respond, but we need to respond in ways that point to Jesus and build bridges, not walls.

***[25]***

Some of you are aware of the initiative that the BC Public School Board is bringing into the public schools called SOGI 123. SOGI stands for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. It has been adopted in Alberta, Ontario, and BC. It’s not a curriculum as such, but rather, a comprehensive socialization of children from kindergarten to grade twelve.

It is being brought in under the guise of an anti-bullying initiative, but it is much more than that. The basic gist of it is that teachers are being taught how to speak to their students in every subject in such a way as to teach them that there are more than two genders. As a matter of fact, they say there are 63 genders on a continuum. They are telling your children that they do not have to choose their gender until they are in about grade four. They also are teaching them that gender is not static. It is fluid, meaning, you may be one gender today, depending on how you feel, and another tomorrow.

Let’s be very clear. God created two genders, male and female. That doesn’t mean that someone might feel like a different gender on the inside. There are all kinds of reasons for gender confusion, but gender dysphoria does not change a person’s gender biologically. This is a social experiment that is going to go very badly.

As I said, it is being taught under the guise of anti-bullying. It is actually an initiative from some activists from the LGBTQ community. Please be aware that not all LGBTQ people are in favour of this. There is a group of parents in Campbell River who are working to put a stop to this here in our school district. One of the men on their team is transgendered - a man who dresses as a woman, but he himself says this is not healthy and is confusing and dangerous for kids and families.

I'm not going to get into this much more than to talk about how we should respond. If you want more information, I would strongly encourage you to do your own research. Do a Google search on SOGI 123. They have all kinds of information about what they are doing.

So, how do we respond? There are lots of possible ways we could respond. One would be to not do anything. I don't think that would be wise when we are talking about the future of our children and families.

We could send nasty letters and march with pickets with mean angry slogans on placards. I don't think that would present the name of Jesus in a very good light though.

[26]

I want to make one thing very clear. Whatever we do, **we need everyone to know that they are loved and welcomed by Jesus at CRBC.** We never want to give anyone, no matter who they are, no matter what their gender identity or sexual orientation is, the impression that we do not love or accept them. Bullying, finger pointing, name calling, and blaming is never okay. We need to make sure that we are building bridges and not walls.

That said, it is also okay to stand up for what we believe to be true and let those in authority over us know that we believe what they are doing will damage our children, as long as it is done in a loving way. I think Paul was very clear with the Corinthians about the correct way to respond.

[27]

**1 Corinthians 16:13–14 (NLT)**

***<sup>13</sup> Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. <sup>14</sup> And do everything with love.***

Do everything with love — everything.

[28]

**James 1:20 (NLT)**

***<sup>20</sup> Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.***

Many times it's not what you say, but how you say it. Remember that you are an ambassador of Jesus Christ. What you say, how you say it, and how you act reflects on Jesus.

[29]

**Colossians 3:17 (NLT)**

***<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.***

For those of you who are parents with kids in the public school system you will have opportunity to talk with teachers and administrators and with other parents. Make sure you always remember, you are a representative of Jesus. What you say and how you say it is important, and the people you are talking to were created in the image of God who died for them. He wants to bring them into relationship with himself through you.

Here is one more passage.

[30]

**Colossians 4:2–6 (NLT)**

***<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. <sup>3</sup> Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. <sup>5</sup> Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.***

Pray. This is the most important thing you can do.

**[31]**

1. **Devote yourself to prayer.**
2. **Be alert. Know what is happening in your kids' classrooms.**
3. **Pray for opportunities to speak about Jesus clearly.**
4. **Pray for wisdom for how to live amongst those who don't have the same belief system we have.**
5. **Pray that your conversation would always be gracious and attractive. Don't be afraid to stand up and with an opposing view, but do it in a way that reflects the character of Jesus.**
6. **Pray that your life would point people to Jesus.**
7. **Know that we are living in a fallen world. Satan is at work.**

The outcome you want may not come to fruition. Be okay with that, knowing that God is in charge. He said it would be like this in the end times. This should not come as a surprise to any of us.

Our job now is to not get distracted from our main job of pointing people to Jesus. John the Baptist and Jesus lived in much crazier times than we do. John did not get distracted. Neither did Jesus. Please do not forget what our main focus is. We are ambassadors of Jesus in everything we say and do.

**[32]**

And above all, God is calling us to get *our* hearts right. Like we said last week, we are all called to repent of the hardness of *our* hearts. That is what John the Baptist's main message was. It was a general call to everyone to stop pointing their fingers at others and make sure that their hearts were right with God.

**[33]**

We are called to be lights pointing to Jesus. We are his ambassadors. **Let's get our hearts right and then go out and love those around us with the grace and truth of Jesus.**



***Lights in a Dark World***  
***April 22, 2018, Jeff Germon***  
**Luke 3:1-18**  
**Week of April 22, 2018**

**Objective of this study:** To think about what job God has given us and how he wants us to accomplish it.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Isaiah 40:3-5** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

**Welcome (5 minutes)**

What is, or was, your dream job?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

**Word (30-45 minutes)**

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Luke 3:1-18
  1. What is the historical setting of this story? What sort of social turbulence was going on then?
  2. Who are the key players?
  3. Describe the different groups coming to John and their different responses to him, and his responses to them. See also Matthew 3:7.
  4. Describe John. What was he like? What would you have thought of him?
  5. What job did God give him?
  6. What would it have been like for each of these different groups to see him and hear his message?
3. Read John 1:6-8 and John 3:22-36.
  1. John seemed to be very clear about his God-given role. What was it?
    1. What things was he able to say 'no' to because of that clarity?
    2. Find all the ways he pointed to Jesus.
    3. Describe his attitude.

**Work (30-45 minutes)**

1. What are some socio/politico/religious groups these days?
2. Do these groups get along? What different viewpoints and pulls are there now?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 16:13-14; James 1:20; Colossians 3:17; Colossians 4:2-6.
  1. What's our God-given job in the world?



2. How are we supposed to do it?

**Continued.....**

**Sermon quote:** “Our job now is to not get distracted from our main job of pointing people to Jesus. John the Baptist and Jesus lived in much crazier times than we do. John did not get distracted. Neither did Jesus. Please do not forget what our main focus is. We are ambassadors of Jesus in everything we say and do.

And above all, God is calling us to get our hearts right. Like we said last week, we are all called to repent of the hardness of our hearts. That is what John the Baptist’s main message was. It was a general call to everyone to stop pointing their fingers at others and make sure that their hearts were right with God.

We are called to be lights pointing to Jesus. We are his ambassadors.”

### **Prayer**

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
  - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
  - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
  - C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
  - D. **Our missionary of the month:** Mark and Catherine Buhler
  - E. **Our missionary of the week:** Duane and Dawn Bakken
  - F. **Local CR church:** Church of the Way, Pastors Rick and Brenda Shuttleworth