

Luke 3:2-18

John Prepares the Way for Jesus

Section One: John the Road Worker

? What's your most memorable road trip?

Luke 3:2-6 (NIV)

² During the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become
straight,

the rough ways smooth.

⁶ And all people will see God's salvation.”

Historical Context:

Throughout history, kings would often send envoys or heralds ahead of them to straighten the road – filling in gaps and shaving down the bumps – in order to make their king's journey a smooth one. Similarly, John the Baptist was sent to pave the way for the Messiah; however, the road that John had to smooth out was the road to Israel's heart.

The Jews of John's day had grown immoral and hard-hearted. They had grown to believe that since they had physically descended from Abraham's line, they were entitled to the Messiah's blessing. This led to widespread hypocrisy, immorality, racism, and selfishness. Gross ritualism had buried God's true law under priestly traditions of the day. All of this made it difficult for first century Jews to recognize God's Messiah when He finally came.

? John wasn't literally doing roadwork, but he did help prepare the Jewish people mentally and spiritually for Jesus' arrival. In what ways do you think the Jews were unprepared for the Messiah?

? Are there any truths about the Gospel that you've struggled to understand or believe because of your upbringing?

? What kinds of misconceptions about Christ have you overcome in your own life?

? How can you prepare yourself to better allow God to speak truth into your life?

Section Two: Don't Quit Your Day Job

Luke 3:7-18 (NIV)

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

¹³ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

The Gospel at Work

Israel didn't believe that people like tax collectors and soldiers could please God while employed by the Romans, but John doesn't tell these kinds of people to quit their jobs. Instead, he tells them to repent and stop exploiting others when they work. These people didn't need to quit their jobs in order to please God. Instead, they just needed to bring the Gospel's truths into their daily duties. In this way, they would honor God through the work they were already doing.

? Tax collectors and soldiers were notorious for acts such as cheating and extorting. Why is it significant that John addresses their actions rather than their career?

? John urges his followers to lead a life of repentance. What is your definition of repentance?

? John commanded the crowds to multiple actions as he called them to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” How do these commands lead to biblical fruit?

? What empowers us to live the kind of life John suggests?

? Do you ever feel like God can’t use you based on the jobs/hobbies/schoolwork you currently have? How might you be a blessing to God and others in your current job/hobbies/schooling?

For Discussion and Accountability

? These are the areas of my life where I need to seek repentance...

? I can better honor God in my “work” by...

Additional Reading: Luke 3:19-38

You may wish to read the remainder of Luke 3 outside of small group time.

¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

²³ Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph,

the son of Heli, ²⁴ the son of Matthat,

the son of Levi, the son of Melki,

the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

²⁵ the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos,

the son of Nahum, the son of Esli,
the son of Naggai, ²⁶ the son of Maath,
the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein,
the son of Josek, the son of Joda,
²⁷ the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa,
the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,
the son of Neri, ²⁸ the son of Melki,
the son of Addi, the son of Cosam,
the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,
²⁹ the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer,
the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat,
the son of Levi, ³⁰ the son of Simeon,
the son of Judah, the son of Joseph,
the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,
³¹ the son of Melea, the son of Menna,
the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan,
the son of David, ³² the son of Jesse,
the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,
the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,
³³ the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram,
the son of Hezron, the son of Perez,
the son of Judah, ³⁴ the son of Jacob,
the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham,
the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,
³⁵ the son of Serug, the son of Reu,
the son of Peleg, the son of Eber,
the son of Shelah, ³⁶ the son of Cainan,
the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem,
the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,
³⁷ the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch,
the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel,
the son of Kenan, ³⁸ the son of Enosh,
the son of Seth, the son of Adam,
the son of God.