

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 3:1-6

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will read Luke chapter 3. Today, we will read verses 1-6.

Verses 1–2: “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.”

Luke is an author who uses words with great precision and remarkable brief. With the mention of just seven individuals, he clearly sets before us the historical and political background of that time. The first is “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,” which would be around A.D. 26–27. Tiberius, the son of Augustus mentioned in the previous chapter, was by tradition a cruel and autocratic ruler. By stating the fifteenth year of his reign, Luke immediately situates us within the era of Roman rule.

Next, Pontius Pilate is mentioned as governor of Judea. The Herod who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth—commonly called Herod the Great—had already died. He divided his territory among his sons. Originally, Judea, including Jerusalem and Samaria, was given to his son Archelaus. However, Archelaus was incompetent and immoral, and was soon removed by the Romans. Consequently, Rome appointed a Roman official, Pontius Pilate, as governor of that region. Thus, when Jesus was later tried and crucified in Jerusalem, it was under the authority of Pontius Pilate.

Then Luke mentions Herod as tetrarch of Galilee. This Herod was Herod Antipas, another son of Herod the Great. He ruled over Galilee, including Nazareth, where

Jesus grew up. His brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, an area around Caesarea Philippi near Mount Hermon, north of Judea, where relatively few Jews lived. Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, a region north of Mount Hermon and east of Judea.

With just a few brief statements, Luke lays out the entire political and geographical setting. He then adds that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. According to the law of Israel, the high priesthood was to be passed down through the line of Aaron. However, during the period between the two Covenants, because this office carried great prestige among the Jews, the Romans intervened and treated it as a political bargaining tool. The Sadducees, who were generally wealthy, often obtained this position through money and influence.

Normally, there should have been only one high priest, yet here two are mentioned. Annas had been high priest in Jesus' time, but after offending the Romans, he was deposed, and the office was given to his son-in-law Caiaphas. Officially, Caiaphas was the high priest, but in reality, Annas still wielded greater influence. Therefore, Luke mentions both of them together as high priests: Caiaphas in title, Annas in actual power.

After Luke succinctly presents the time and setting of that period by mentioning only a few names, Luke moves to his main subject: "the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." Throughout history, when God intends to use a person, He often first places that person in the wilderness. Moses spent forty years shepherding sheep in the wilderness until he saw the burning bush and was called by God to lead two million Israelites out of Egypt.

John's experience was similar. Because Zacharias was already advanced in age when John was born, many interpreters believe that John lost his parents while still young. As a result, he left Jerusalem, which should have been the dwelling place of priests, and went into the wilderness—likely the Judean wilderness west of the Dead Sea.

At that time, a group of Jewish sectarians lived in that area. They were extremely conservative, remain celibacy, and lived very simple lives, fervently awaiting the coming of the Messiah. John was likely raised among the Essenes and thus lived in

the wilderness. God often uses the wilderness to train the hearts of His servants. John probably spent more than ten years there, living a very simple life. Matthew tells us that he wore a garment of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. Camel's hair was ceremonially unclean. Although John was born into a priestly family, he completely set aside the elaborate rituals of the Old Testament priesthood and, under God's leading, lived a simple life in the wilderness—a life wholly devoted to seeking the Lord.

Then Luke records, “the word of God came to him.” When the time came, God spoke to him and called him, just as God had once called Moses, and just as He had called Elijah. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah appears suddenly because the word of the Lord came to him. John was the same. After spending time in the wilderness, the word of God came to him.

Verse 3: “And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”

John was the last prophet of the Old Testament and the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the word of God came to him, God gave him a specific message. He accepted God's call and went throughout the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Scripture uses its words with great precision. Here, “the word” that came to John is not *logos* in Greek, but *rhema*. *Logos* refers to God's overarching plan and eternal will—the great Word, which Jesus Christ Himself is: “In the beginning was the Word.” But the word that came to John was *rhema*—a timely, specific word, a word that stirs and calls a person to commit himself to a particular task.

God gave John a very specific mission: to preach a baptism of repentance, so that people would clearly see their own condition—how defiled and unworthy they were—and thus be willing to repent. Repentance emphasizes a change of mind. Such a change requires first recognizing one's true condition. When a person realizes how defiled and broken he is, he becomes willing to change his mind. Through that change, and through John's baptism, sins could be forgiven. This was

entirely passive in nature. John's baptism could not impart positive life; it only enabled people, in a passive sense, to recognize their true condition and become willing to change.

Verses 4–6: “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight, And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Here Luke quotes Isaiah 40:3–5 in full. This passage is cited in all four Gospels, but Luke alone quotes it completely. Isaiah has 66 chapters: the first 39 correspond to the Old Testament, and chapter 40 marks the beginning of the New Testament section. Precisely in Isaiah 40:3–5, John's ministry is foretold. He lived in the wilderness; he was the voice in the wilderness. What voice? A voice crying out to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight.

John clearly understood his ministry: it was a preparatory ministry, an introductory ministry, to prepare people's hearts to receive salvation. What John preached was not the full salvation itself, but a preparation—helping people see the true condition of their hearts, how filthy and defiled they were. “Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth.” Our hearts are full of pits and valleys, full of mountains and hills of pride, full of crookedness and unevenness.

Then comes the result: “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God!” John knew that his ministry was not the complete salvation of God, but a preparation—filling the valleys, leveling the hills, straightening the crooked paths. Although John's ministry was not the full gospel, it was the indispensable groundwork that enables people to receive the gospel.

Today, much of our evangelism focuses too much on human needs and speaks only of God's love. But a genuine gospel must begin with John's ministry. John's ministry

clearly points out the true condition of the human heart. Without recognizing our true nature, it is very difficult for a person to humble himself and accept God's salvation. Only when we clearly see that our hearts are full of valleys, hills, crookedness, and unevenness can we truly receive salvation. Without the preparation of John's ministry, we may think salvation exists merely to meet our needs. In reality, our greatest need is to see our true condition and realize that we are utterly without hope. Only when we recognize our corruption, our unworthiness, and our hopelessness, and humbly come before salvation, can we firmly receive true salvation.

Let us pray together: Lord, even today, help us in our hearts. Search us and shine Your light upon us. Let us see that our hearts are full of darkness, full of jealousy, selfishness, and greed. Let us understand our true condition, so that we may humbly bow before Your grace and allow Your grace to truly come upon us. May John's ministry of repentance work in our hearts today—preparing our hearts to receive salvation. Thank You, we pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.