

Luke 3:1-20, Part 2 6-24-18
The Example of John: Boldness

We read for the second week from the third chapter of Luke, and what we discover in it about our man John. Luke 3:**1-20**

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, 2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the district 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, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. 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; 6 and all flesh will see the salvation of God.’” 7 So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” 10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?” 11 And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” 12 And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” 13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” 14 Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.” 15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” 18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. 19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, 20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

Think for a moment about your ideal Christian. Imagine the model of godliness. What is that person like? What is true godliness? I ask you that because I expect that for most of us our

model of godliness does not measure up to Moses or Paul, to Elijah or Peter, to David or Jesus. I find one major contrast between the modern view of the man of God and the Biblical one. As I read the Bible, one outstanding feature of the heroes of faith impresses me time and time again. And I think it impacts me so because of its contrast to modern ideals. That feature is *boldness*. Courage, fearlessness, boldness. AW Tozer writes:

The popular image of the man of God as a smiling, congenial, asexual religious mascot whose handshake is always soft and whose head is always bobbing in the perpetual "Yes" of universal acquiescence is not the image found in the Scriptures of truth.

It certainly is not. The saints of Scripture were those who roared like lions in the face of the enemies of God. By the way, do you know what John the Baptist and Winnie the Pooh have in common? The same middle name. They also both like honey. But at that point the similarities end. Pooh is a fluffy bear, but when we think of John the Baptist we picture a rock-hard man in the way he lived and the way he preached. Jesus said, Matthew 11:**7b-8b** *"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 11a Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!* No one is greater than John! Now John, we are told by Mark, wore camel's hair and a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey. But, we need not imitate his dress or his diet. It is his character that merits imitation. And the outstanding character quality of John is boldness.

Today we look at two things: How John was bold and why John was bold. So, first off, how was John bold? Or put another way, in what way was John the Baptist bold? And to that question consider four answers.

#1 – John was bold in preaching repentance. We saw last week that John's message was "repent." This is seldom the message heard today, simply because it is not popular. It offends the proud sons of Adam and those who would rather offend God than man simply leave it out of their message. We are very careful to appear *positive* in our approach, so we downplay the seriousness of sin and the necessity of turning from it. After all, to be told *you're a sinner and need to repent*, stings doesn't it? You don't want to sting. Helmut Thelicke says:

Jesus did not say “You are the honey of the world.” He said, “You are the salt of the earth.” Salt bites and the unadulterated message of the judgment and grace of God has always been a biting thing – so much so that men have revolted against it and even bitten back at it. It has always been easier to go along with the honey-gods of natural religion. Where there is salt in a church and in its preaching there is bound to be a sour reaction against it. For salt always bites and stings at the points where we men have wounds, where we are vulnerable. We want healing without pain and besides we do not even want to be reminded of those sore spots. That’s why the world not only shouts for the golden calf, but also for the honey-gods who will make us forget our deepest wounds. (Leadership Winter 83, p. 116)

John the Baptist ate honey, but he dished out salt in heavy doses. And because that is so unpopular it requires boldness. It requires courage. The late musician Keith Green was a man committed to preaching a Biblical gospel that included repentance. He recognized the commitment that would take and wrote a song called, “I Pledge My Head to Heaven.” Green was on a personal retreat when he ran across these words in a sermon by Joseph Parker on John the Baptist. Parker said, *The man whose little sermon is “repent” sets himself against his age, and will, for the time being, be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for such a man – “off with his head!” You had better not try to preach repentance until you have pledged your head to heaven.* John the Baptist was beheaded for his boldness, for preaching that little sermon, “repent.”

The second way John was bold is in rebuking the religious. I said the *religious* not the *righteous*. John preached to a religious nation and he rebuked the people by calling on them to repent and be baptized. Baptism was for those who needed moral cleansing. John the Baptist said, “Even you religious Jews need a moral bath. You are dirty.” And he said it in a strident way. Luke **3:7** *He began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”* Brood of vipers? Sons of snakes – the symbol of the devil? My, my, John’s a bit rough isn’t he? This wasn’t a very *Christian* thing to say, was it? Well, the only man in Scripture who rebuked more harshly was Christ himself. Jesus said in John 8:**44a** *You are of your father the devil.* He told the Pharisees they were blind fools, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs. And if that kind of talk doesn’t fit your concept of godliness where lies the problem? Jesus called a spade a spade. He refused to soften His words to please men and neither did John the Baptist.

John went beyond saying, “You have sinned.” He said, “You’re a sinner.” Not only is your behavior wrong, your heart is rotten too. He said **9a** *The axe is already laid at the root of*

*the trees. Why the root? **9b** So every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

If the fruit is the problem, why cut at the root – why not just chop off the fruit? You know why. The fruit only reveals what is at the root. Rotten fruit results from a rotten root. And sin only springs from a corrupt heart. I find that most everyone, believer or not, recognizes that they are sinners. They don't get too bothered by you're telling them that. They think, "Sure, I've messed up some." But they also think, "Deep down I'm a really good guy." John says, "You're a brood of vipers." Do you think that took boldness?

The third way in which John was bold was in confronting the powerful. Some of you may be very bold in speaking with your wife or your kids. You don't think they can hurt you. We are often bold where it's easy. We have our pro-life rallies and denounce abortion before those who agree. We call homosexual behavior a sin from the pulpit, before those we know will agree. But it's another thing to be bold in the face of those who can and may do you harm. But that's just what John did. Verse 19 speaks of Herod who had absolute political power over John. **19-20** *Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, 20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.* John preached his message of specific repentance to his king. He stuck out his neck and it was chopped off, but John was still bold, even toward the powerful. Some people wonder if preachers should speak out on politics. There's no need to wonder – just read the book. Moses confronted Pharaoh, Samuel reproved Saul, Nathan rebuked David, Elijah rebuked Ahab, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos – all the prophets spoke out on politics and to politicians at those places where political issues intersected with morality and revealed truth. They may have preached and run like Elijah, but they did preach. And they did it in spite of the dangers to themselves. John the Baptist was of the breed of the prophets who were men of fiery, unquenchable boldness. Elijah came to Ahab, his king, and said, "There will be no rain." And there wasn't. Ahab started looking for Elijah to kill him. So, Elijah visits Ahab again and says I Kings 18:**18** *I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals.* The high priest didn't like the preaching of Jeremiah and so had him beaten and put in stocks. The next day he was released and responded by pronouncing judgments on the high priest and the nation. Can you believe these guys? Another great example of this kind of boldness is in the book of Acts where

Peter preached continually between his trips to jail. Stephen also stood before an angry mob, that later stoned him and said to these angry men Acts 7:**51** *You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.* Boldness from the Holy Spirit conquers the fear of consequences. It is willing to preach repentance, rebuke the religious, and confront the powerful.

And one more thing must be said about how John was bold. He was bold in applying the truth. After telling the people to repent he got very specific about what that meant. He didn't just say, *be generous and love your neighbor.* He said in verse 11, if you have two shirts and your neighbor has none, give him one of yours. In verse 13 he applied the truth to the life of the tax-collector. In 14 he applied it to the soldiers. You see? Most specifically he looked at Herod and said more than, "You should try to be a moral example." He said, "Dump that wicked woman!" And it is when a preacher pointedly applies the word of God to the here and now daily lifestyle of his hearers that he gets folks angry. They say, "You've quit preachin and gone to meddlin." I've found that when you say, "Love your neighbor, give of yourself to others, seek justice, be careful what you say" people go, "Yea, that's how to live and I sure hope my teenager heard that." The truth usually can bounce off us like water on a waxed car. We can be blind to our own sin and how the principles of Scripture should change us. But it helps when it is specifically applied. Doing this is risky and requires boldness, but the more pointed the applications the better and John offers a great example of preaching that is pointed, applied and very, bold.

Now bold is something few of us are. That's right isn't it? I'm a card-carrying member of the chicken alliance. We have a strong, innate fear of confrontation. We want so much to be at peace with others and so we try ardently to avoid conflict, even to the point of forsaking our responsibilities as witnesses and ambassadors for Christ. Do you need a boldness transfusion? So you can stand up for what's right, speak out in the face of opposition, share Christ with love and not fear? Do you want to be more like John? If so listen up as we proceed to study what made him so bold.

To the question, "What made John so bold?" Consider three answers. #1 – he placed mission over self. John was a man with a mission, and a task and he lived only to achieve it. He was not out for self-advancement or personal pleasure. He lived to preach his message. When men asked him who he was he said, "I am a voice." He was a man possessed by his calling, by his mission. And when you place your calling over your safety you will be a brave man and a

bold woman. Once a young man in the coast guard was called to take part in a desperate assignment. A great storm had arisen and a ship was signaling distress. As the men began to get ready the frightened young sailor cried out, “*We will never get back!*” His captain replied, “*We don’t have to get back, but we do have to go out.*” God never expects you to live a long life, but he does expect you to live a faithful one.

When in Babylon Daniel and his three friends faced a severe test of their loyalty to God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced a fiery furnace. Daniel faced a lion’s den. And in both cases they faced the choice, “What is preeminent, my mission to God or my own life?” They chose mission and therefore they were bold for God in a hostile land. One of my favorite words from the Apostle Paul comes to us in Acts 20 and I’d like for you to see it and wonder at it as I have for so long. Paul here beautifully expresses this same attitude which he shared with John the Baptist. **22-24** *Now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.* Just like John, he says, “I have a mission and a message.” That is what counts. So, Paul armed with this attitude and John armed with the same attitude stood before kings and priests and angry mobs and said, “Repent” to the peril of their own lives. John the Baptist placed mission before self and that made him bold.

The second thing about John that made him bold was that he valued God’s approval over man’s. He did not preach a man-pleasing message or live a man-pleasing life, but he was locked into a relationship with God and a devotion to Him. That seems to be all he cared about. Now that’s a far piece from where most of us are, myself included. We crave for the approval of men and that, more than anything, makes us cowardly. In your head you know that God’s approval is what counts. You know Proverbs 29:**25a** *The fear of man brings a snare.* We need continually to be reminded of the words of Jesus. Matthew 10:**28** *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* This truth from Jesus was lived out in the life of John and again, the same dynamic principle that moved John moved Paul. Paul said his great hope was that “**with all boldness** Christ might be exalted in my body whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20). Paul, remember, came out of a Jewish religious world that hated what he preached. I Thessalonians 2:**1-2** *For you yourselves*

know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. Now ask, why Paul? What gave you that boldness? **4** *We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.* Boldness for God is your mission. It's the right thing to do. But it's also smart because ultimately God is the one who will reward and punish. Cherish God's favor and approval on your life and you will grow bold.

The third thing that made John the Baptist bold was his confidence that God was with him.

Paul had the same thing and he says why in this text in I Thessalonians 2. He's already told us he was after God's approval, but in verses 2 he mentions another crucial idea **2** *After we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.* Why would he put up with the suffering in order to preach? Why was he so bold? He knew that what he had in the gospel was not some clever human idea, it was and is the gospel of God. I Thessalonians 2: **13** *We also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.* When you proclaim God's word you can be sure God will take care of you and you can be bold. That same thing explains the boldness of the Baptist. Luke says "The word of God came to John". Why was he willing to die preaching his message? It wasn't his. It was God's and when you are confident of the truth you will be bold with the truth because where His truth is, God is. Referring to the first enemies of the church in Jerusalem, we read Acts 4:**13** *Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.* Okay, having been with Jesus was part of it, but what made Peter and John confident was not just that they had been with Jesus, but that even while they preached Jesus was with them. Jesus had told them, *I am with you always.* And this assurance gave them boldness. When you know God is with you, the fear of death won't control you since death cannot separate you from God. Were it not for heaven, John and Peter and Paul were fools. But they knew God was with them and so today and tomorrow is secure. That's the key to boldness. Proverbs 28:**1** *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing; but the righteous are bold as a lion.* Why? Because

God is with the righteous. When God told Moses to boldly go to Pharaoh and say, “Let my people go,” Moses reacted like you and I would. *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?* God’s first response was, “Moses, I will be with you.” You too can be bold when you know that.

Now John the Baptist knew God was with him because (and this is crucial) John had been with God. Luke 3:2 *In the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.* The word did not come to John in the hustle and bustle of big city life. It came in the quiet and solitude of the wilderness where he was with the Lord. Verse 3 says he **came** to the Jordan where the people were. John came from his solitude with God down to the people and this is an important model. Before you stand before men it is good to kneel before God. Moses came down from the mountain with God to speak to the people. Tozer says a pastor must never come up to or into the pulpit. He must always come down to the pulpit, coming from the presence of the Lord. When I succeed in doing that, you folks aren’t nearly so frightening.

This is so important if we are to become people of boldness. I can testify that what confidence I have as a preacher, as a pastor, as a man is due to my time spent alone with God. Moses went from the wilderness with God to stand before Pharaoh. David left his solitude as a shepherd to face Goliath. Jesus prayed alone in Gethsemane as He stood before the horror of His death. And the strength of John the Baptist before men came from his time alone before God. If you would be bold, learn from his example. Place your mission before yourself, value God’s approval over man’s, and then as you remember He is with you spend time with your God and you will have confidence that God is with you and you will have a loving boldness that will honor the Lord. Let’s pray for that together.