

The Opening Act

Passage: Luke 3:1 - 18

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Good morning, church. My name is Cormac Parker Jr., and I serve as one of the pastors here at PBC. It's so good to worship with you as we open God's Word together this morning.

If you have a Bible, I want to invite you to meet me in Luke chapter 3, starting in verse 1, as we continue our series through the Gospel of Luke.

Last week, we saw Jesus at twelve years old, staying behind in the temple during a family trip to Jerusalem. In that moment, He revealed His identity as the Son of God and His commitment to His Father's will. The story ended with Jesus returning home, living a quiet, faithful life - and now, our text picks up about eighteen years later.

The Opening Act

I'll never forget the first time I got to see one of my favorite jazz vocalists, Gregory Porter, live in concert. Jazmine surprised me with tickets for my birthday when we were living in Los Angeles.

His band played first - the opening act.

They were great. Talented. Tight. But they weren't the reason she bought the tickets.

Their job wasn't to steal the spotlight. It was to wake the room up, set the tone, and prepare the crowd for what was coming next.

That's exactly who John the Baptist is in Luke 3.

He's the opening act - not the headliner. His role is to prepare hearts to receive the One greater than him.

A People Longing for Freedom

John's audience was the people of Israel - an oppressed people. A people longing for freedom. Waiting for change.

And while we're separated from them by thousands of years, we're not separated from that longing. We live in a broken world, and there's a quiet soundtrack playing in all of our hearts that says, "It's not supposed to be this way."

When a porch pirate steals a package from your front door.
When low-wage workers are denied fair pay.
When someone is denied housing because of the color of their skin.
When innocent people - especially children - lose their lives because of decisions they didn't make.

We know that ache.

The people of Israel had an idea of what freedom should look like. But John is about to challenge them - and invite them - into a deeper vision. *What does freedom look like in a broken world?*

God Speaks in the Wilderness

Luke begins by anchoring this moment in history:

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...” (Luke 3:1)

Luke names political leaders and religious authorities - many of whom were cruel, corrupt, and oppressive. These were not good times.

Political oppression.

Economic exploitation.

Religious burden.

And yet, verse 2 tells us something powerful:

“The word of God came to John... in the wilderness.” (Luke 3:2)

Not in the palace.

Not in the temple.

But in the wilderness.

It had been four hundred years since God had spoken through a prophet. From Malachi to John - silence. And yet, God was not absent. While God was silent, He was still working - preparing roads, unifying language, orchestrating history for the spread of the gospel.

Here's a theological truth worth holding onto: *We can trust God even when we can't trace God - because He has proven faithful over time.*

It reminds me of family gatherings growing up. The most important question wasn't what was on the menu - it was who cookin'? And yes, without the “g.”

If grandma was cooking, we didn't mind waiting. Why? Because she was proven. We knew she could take raw ingredients and turn them into something that would bless your soul.

Even when God feels silent, He's still in the kitchen - working all things together for our good and His glory.

Trust God, Even in Silence

The word of the Lord comes to John, and he begins proclaiming a baptism of repentance - a turning, a reorientation of life toward God.

This fulfills the prophecy spoken over him before his birth:

"He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:16 - 17)

John stands in the Jordan River - the same river Israel crossed into freedom - calling people not to what they want to hear, but to what they need: return to God.

Luke then quotes Isaiah 40:

"Prepare the way of the Lord... and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

This isn't just about Israel. Luke emphasizes all flesh. This is good news for everyone.

Grace That Reveals

John's preaching gets... intense.

"You brood of vipers!"

That phrase would have landed hard. It was diagnostic language. Grace that reveals where you really are. The issue wasn't their ethnicity or heritage - it was that they were trusting tradition instead of transformation. They had made a good thing - identity - the ultimate thing. And that's how idols are formed.

Grace reveals. And when grace reveals, people begin to ask honest questions: "What then should we do?"

John answers three groups:

The crowds → Generosity

Tax collectors → Integrity

Soldiers → Justice

Notice the theme: money and power - the very things fueling their oppression. Repentance isn't just vertical; it's horizontal. It reshapes how we treat people. John doesn't tell them to quit their jobs. He tells them to live faithfully where they are. Bloom where you're planted.

If John showed up on our street today, maybe he'd say:

If you have extra space, open your home.

If you run a company, don't profit at the expense of people.

Use your influence to honor the image of God in others.

True Freedom

As the passage ends, the people wonder if John might be the Messiah. He shuts that down quickly. He knows he's not the headliner. Only Jesus can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart.

True freedom isn't found in adding more - it's found in turning again.

As Blaise Pascal famously said, "There's a God-shaped vacuum in the human heart that cannot be filled by anything created - only by the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."

So today, we don't strive.

We don't perform.

We turn.

When God feels silent - trust Him.

When grace reveals - receive it.

When truth confronts - turn toward God.

Let's take a moment now to reflect and pray.