

01.12.25

Luke

Chapter 3 - A Different Kind of Authority
An Uncommon Voice (vs. 1-6)

Luke 3:1-6: 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, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; 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. ‘EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW;

THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT,
AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;
AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.’”

I actually feel that one of my jobs that I have is to cause you to fall in love with Scripture. In this particular setting, my job or my responsibility, my privilege, is to get you to fall in with the Gospel of Luke. How unique it is; even though when you consider Matthew, Mark, Luke, are referred to as what is called the Synoptic Gospels, which in some way is basically saying they're more alike, yet you see the distinction of each of the gospels. You see the uniqueness of it, and it's really in that uniqueness that I'm really drawn. One of the things that I want to do a little bit different, though, each gospel has a focus, that is to say, like the Gospel of Matthew will focus on Christ as the great King. So, it'll mention the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven” over and over again, and you begin to see that this is about a new kingdom. Yet you also realize that the audience is different, and what we've done this time is we

come from the perspective of not as much the general focus of kingdom or servitude with the Gospel of Mark, but who is the audience? In other words, why was he proclaiming these things to this people? You begin to realize that each of the groups that are being referred to are dealing with different issues and each gospel, though applicable to all of us, is going to be in many respects, drawing certain ones of us more than others. So, as you go through the Gospel of Matthew, what's clear is that you're dealing with those that are being oppressed by the kingdoms of the world. They're being oppressed by the world and the authorities that are in the world.

One of the great things about Matthew 23 is you see Jesus, really confronting, coming upon the Pharisees, and He begins to say, "Woe, Pharisees, Scribes! You're taking advantage of people. You're taking advantage of widows." And He begins to talk about a new authority that's not going to do that. So, you realize that Matthew is dealing with the audience of the oppressed.

When you come to the Gospel of Mark, though, the emphasis is Christ as the server, and you'll see repeated

over and over again that it states “immediately”, and you begin to see the sense of God desiring to help us. You realize in the Gospel of Mark that you're dealing with those that have been neglected, and it is the neglected that need to know that somebody cares and that somebody is anxious to serve. One of the great texts in the Book of Isaiah is, “Behold, My Servant,” and it talks about the Messiah that's going to come as a Servant. So, Mark will emphasize this, but who is the audience in the Gospel of Mark? It's the neglected.

When you come to the Gospel of John, there's no doubt about it that you're dealing with those that have been unloved, and the great emphasis of “for God so loved the world.” What a wonderful text, and you begin to see that He even loves this woman at the well, and He loves those that in many respects would be perceived to be unlovable. But you begin to see throughout, the love of God and the fact that a Creator of the universe would actually love; that's an amazing thought. it's a thought that obviously those that were Stoics couldn't get in their

heads and in many respects, the Book of John was written to them.

When we come to the Gospel of Luke, you realize that there's a lot of emphasis in humility, but more specifically, you see the audience of the unlikely and those that you would think that were left out or that would be on the fringe or possibly totally outcast are those that are embraced in this particular gospel. So, if in fact you are feeling that "I'm the last person on earth God would care about having fellowship with," the Gospel of Luke is for you, and you begin to see that.

As you go through the pages, just to kind of give you an interesting example, you have the story of Mary and Martha in the text. Of course, Martha is very busy doing things and you would say she's the one that's going to be getting the praise and the adoration, but Christ says, "It's Mary that I'm really considering because she's the one that's sitting at My feet." And I say to myself, "Well, I could do that," but it's the desire that He's looking for. Oftentimes, performers perceive that they should have the highest position and God says, "Not necessarily. It's

the heart that I'm looking for." So, the Gospel of Luke begins to introduce individuals that you're saying to yourself, "Why is He talking about them?" Like the Samaritan. In fact, the Samaritan would actually be in two separate texts. The Good Samaritan that will stop and actually show compassion, and if you remember those that had leprosy and only one came back and it was a Samaritan. But only Luke will record that by the way. And only Luke will record the whole issue of Elizabeth and Mary having prominent positions. Only Luke will make mention of in Luke 8, the women supporting the ministry of Christ. As you go through the gospel, you'll see that Zacchaeus; you know the story of Zacchaeus? Only the Gospel of Luke records it. So, where does the story come from? We read the story of the woman that comes off the street and she begins to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair as she cries, and that's only in the Gospel of Luke. So, we would say to ourselves, "That's the most unlikely person that we've seen." And in that particular passage, Jesus is actually saying to a Pharisee, Simon, whose house He's in, He goes, "You didn't do anything to show Me any kind of love, but this woman hasn't stopped." And she becomes

the teacher, interestingly enough, within the text, and we would say, “Wow, that would be highly unlikely that she would be the one that does the teaching.” Yet God shows that that's true.

So, throughout the pages we begin to see the grace of God and the wonderment of God. When we come to this passage in Luke 3 in particular, we begin to see once again a list of names; we would say the who's who of what's happening. As you begin to see this list, these are dignitaries, these are ones that are in authority, and our perception is that these are people of high degree. These are people that have a stately form, majestic and high in pretense; even beyond that, perhaps in some way having celebrity status. I know that the tendency is if in fact somebody gets saved that is famous or somebody is well known or whatever, we like to put them right in front of the pulpit right away. My thought is, why are you doing that? The pulpit isn't a place in which you elevate those of celebrity status. It's a place in which you elevate the poor. It's a place in which you elevate the lowly. It's a place in which you elevate the least. The whole point of our

gospel is the greatest in the kingdom of God will be those that will be least. So, what the world does, is it obviously reverses the whole thing, and the churches begin to buy into that way of thinking. But let me just emphasize it's erroneous and the reason why it's erroneous is because once again, by even virtue of exalting that position, we're exalting the wrong things, and the Gospel of Luke will just hit this really hard.

So, we come to this passage in which we begin to see these great dignitaries of the world. Sometimes you read the Scripture, and you go, "Well, it seems like they don't even know who's in charge." And Luke goes, "No, no, we know who's in charge. We're just ignoring them because they're not that important, though they think they are."

When we were looking at Chapter 2 in particular in the days of Caesar Augustus, that's a very significant text because Caesar Augustus in his lifetime was declaring the Caesar to be divinity. We talked about this. So, he's declaring himself to be God. It's actually the first time that Caesar's took that position. It was Caesar Augustus. So, Octavian. But as he takes this particular position, at the

very time that he's taking this position and declaring himself "god," and by virtue of declaring himself "god," trying to find out what all he owns, i.e. the census being taken. At that very time, God has become flesh and is dwelling among us in a manger, and the interesting contrast that is given of these two is very unique. The fact that there are clearly dignitaries all over the face of the earth, and yet God says, "I'm not inviting them. I'm just inviting shepherds," is just kind of in your face as you go into the Gospel of Luke. This passage that we're looking at is of that same quality. We begin to list the individuals that are alive and the one that is mentioned right off the bat is Tiberius Caesar, who's now in charge, stepfather being Augustus, has placed him in; his father, now being dead about 15 years because the Scripture says, (Luke 3:1) "...in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius..."

And we know that Caesar Augustus died at probably around 14 AD. So, we're somewhere in the neighborhood of 28,29 or 30 AD. Now, who's in charge? It's Tiberius. The very mentioning of the names in a way is God saying, "I

know exactly who's in charge. I know exactly who the world sees as leaders." But He will literally jump over them, besides just mentioning their name, and He'll go right to John the Baptist, and we'll step back, and we'll go, "John the Baptist? Who's John the Baptist?" He came out of nowhere. He came out of the wilderness. That's what he did. This is a guy that eats locusts and wild honey, and I don't know what kind of garment those are; some kind of garb that is clearly not of eloquence and is certainly not of a higher echelon. Here's a guy that's just been living in the wilderness, and yet he comes with great authority proclaiming a message that is clearly like no other. Why does God use these kinds of guys? Are we seeing any kind of pattern? The answer is absolutely, yes. We're seeing a pattern. You're seeing a pattern throughout Scripture. I mean, you begin to think about people like the Book of Jeremiah, when God comes to Jeremiah, He goes, "I'm going to use you." Jeremiah goes, "You've got the wrong guy." And He goes, "No, I've got the right guy." He says, "No, I'm from the wrong tribe. I'm too young. Nobody's going to listen to me" and God goes, "Just tell them what I tell you." So, he goes out. Of course, one of the greatest

prophets is Jeremiah. You take a guy by the name of Amos, and he was a day laborer. Day laborer. That's what he was. So, he says, "I'm not only not a prophet, but I'm also not a son of a prophet." And God goes, "That's why We're using you." Because He was going to send him to those dignitaries, and He didn't want them seeing that dignitaries were what God was pleased with. So, He's going to send them somebody lowly, and that's exactly what He does. All the way through Scripture, what you begin to see is that God works in this way that you're literally taken back by it. Elijah the Tishbite comes on the scene in the Book of Kings, and we know he's from Gilead, but that's all we know. All of sudden he pops on the scene and now he's in control. It's literally like John the Baptist coming on the scene in the way that he does, and he just takes the leadership.

So, as we go into this passage, what I want you to see is clearly, God is letting us know who's in, but that's it.

They're not of any consequence, but God is showing us that there's a higher authority than these individuals. But He's also showing us a contrast which is the way of life of

the world. See, the world's trying to influence us. Proverbs 1:10 is basically warning the young man. He says, "If sinners try to entice you," and we live in a world where sinners try to entice us, and we live in a world according to Psalm 1, where you have people that are wicked, that in some ways are trying to counsel us. He's actually warning there in Psalm 1 of those wicked people who will try to give us counsel. Then, we also know that there are scoffers that will intimidate us. So, there's a lot of different kinds of pressure that come upon us and obviously, it's oftentimes places of great authority that intimidate us the most.

The warning that Paul gives in Philippians 2:15 is that "You live in a crooked and perverse world, and I want you to be lights in it." And wow, that's a pretty high responsibility because how do you stand out and how are you different? Well, obviously within this particular passage, John the Baptist stands out, there's no doubt about it.

As we pick up in some way, I kind of want to give you a feel of who these people were and what was going on in their life. So, as it starts off, if you look with me,

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

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, things were starting to go from bad to worse. His stepfather, when he had literally handed over the baton to him, quite frankly because some of the sons didn't work out; we won't go into all the detail of that. But when he begins to pass the baton over to Tiberius, Tiberius was married to a woman that he actually really, really loved. He adored. They had a good relationship, and Augustus says, “You're going to have to ditch her. What I want you to do is I want you to marry my daughter, which is your stepsister, and this is what you have to do in order to really reign and bring the kingdom in and everything.” So, he was forced to get rid of his wife, whom he dearly loved. He never really got over that. He was always morose and sad because of that. On top of the fact that the stepsister, her name Julia, was a nutcase. She was so bad off that even Augustus finally

goes, "We've got to get rid of her." So, they had to ship her off because she just was not in control of her faculties. So, not only did he have to for a number of years deal with this individual that was a little bit crazy, but he had to deal with the sorrow of leaving the wife that he loved. In the back of his mind, and what he would oftentimes say is, "I really don't want this job" which is pretty interesting. Who wouldn't want the job of Caesar? Well, I guess when you begin to find out what all is entailed, you begin to realize that power isn't all that wonderful, and I think he was coming to terms with that. So, during the span of 15 years, he's coming to terms with those kinds of things, and by the end of 15 years, he's actually becoming a recluse. So, he's having some puppet people come in and because of that he's having insurrections. So, he's become a recluse. He's living in a place where he doesn't want to deal with people, and he's sending people out.

Actually, Pliny the Elder, which is an ancient writer of that particular time, writes of Tiberius and he gives this quote, "He is the gloomiest of men that I've ever seen." That's

pretty interesting. And Suetonius says that he was very paranoid and depressed. What Scripture is telling us is here are people in great authority, but what the people knew about these individuals is what their life was like. The world will say, "Come be like us" and all you have to do is take a step back and go, "So, what is life like with you?" And you begin to realize it's depressing. It's sorrowful. Go the way of the world and find out. Get everything that you ever thought that you want and see what happens. All you have to do is go down through history and look at these people. We just don't seem to be able to learn from history. But you have this individual, which is interesting, by the name of Tiberius Caesar and going through these difficulties.

You also have listed in the text, Pontius Pilate, and we know a little bit about because of his dealings with Christ at the time of the crucifixion, but perhaps what you don't know is when he was put in the position of the governor of that particular region, he, at this particular juncture, has two strikes against him. He had gone into the temple, and he had begun to put the standards of the empire in

the temple, which was a no-no with the Jews. You don't do that. So, that was causing all kinds of rebellion and insurrection, and he actually ultimately had to take it out. Then, he had gone in another rebellion, insurrection, and he had slain so many people that it was such an overkill that he was now on the outs. One of the reasons why he kind of washes his hands of the whole thing is he wasn't going to get in any more Jewish things again because he knew one more strike and he's out. So, Pilate is in a very precarious position. The whole politic thing is an intricate balance in which he's having to deal with.

You're dealing with Herod, who's a tetrarch of Galilee. Herod is the son of Herod the Great, which it's amazing that he's alive because Herod killed most of his kids, but now he's the tetrarch, and this particular Herod is now going to be very hostile towards even John the Baptist and ultimately take his head off. Herod Antipas will be his name that is being referred to and all of the miseries that he has; he takes his brother's wife, and he's mentioned there, his brother Phillip. Of course, that's one of the reasons why John the Baptist goes, "You shouldn't be

doing that.” because they're supposed to know the Jewish Law, but nevertheless, that didn't come across well. But the fact of the matter is that every one of these dealing with either a broken home or some kind of hurt or pain that has permeated the whole household and nobody's really happy in the whole list, whether it's Philip the Tetrarch of Iturea or Trachonitis or Lysanias.

If you look at the passage, actually, Philip was kind of responsible for the northern part of Galilee and then it seems like Lysanias kind of gets the leftovers in Abilene, which is even further around the Mount Hermon area, but every one of these are dealing with a very miserable life. So, if you were to compact in some way the group of people that are the who's who of misery, it would be this list. Let me just emphasize that the audience, the people would know this. So, the list is given and oh yeah, there's one more list in verse 2, the high priesthood. Well, obviously the people in the religious section are going to be really happy and wonderful and godly people. And of course what you begin to realize is that this particular family of Annas and Caiaphas, Annas being the father-in-

law of Caiaphas, and there's going to be kind of a switching back and forth because of the fact that one gives sympathy towards the Roman government and really both of them have been put in position not because they're righteous people, but because they in some way connect with the Roman government and will fit in politically. This is fundamentally where the Sadducees are coming from, because they're very much political. Strangely enough, the Pharisees hate him because they're these spiritual legalists. So, they know who they are. Nevertheless, they're the high priests, and you won't find a wealthier elite than this family, and with their greed, they're exploiting all kinds of people and there are all kinds of useries going on, and really, nobody likes them. What Scripture is telling us is at the time that these people are in office who's in charge in the world? "Well, certainly the good people are in charge." I don't think so. (Luke 1:2) "in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God..."

The Word of God didn't come to the priests. It didn't come to Caesar. It didn't come to Herod. It didn't come to

the governor. It came to some guy that was living in the wilderness. Do you hear Luke going, “In the days that all these people existed, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.” I mean, it is the most uncommon, unlikely voice that you would perceive. It's in an uncommon place that the word of God has been revealed. He's proclaiming an uncommon purpose and it's very clear that he has an uncommon message. I would say the message is so uncommon that it's actually good news and not bad. It's not about taxes, not about a census, but it's about good news. It's about somebody saving, somebody rescuing. He comes out with great authority, and what you're going to see in particular in Luke 3 is the great authority of God in the midst of the authority of man and how it literally supersedes all of that other authority; how all that other authority just goes and fades in the background and God is now in control.

The passage reads this way,

(Luke 1:3) “And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

When you have the region of Jordan and when he actually refers to all this surrounding area, that's a lot of area. That's actually 150 miles, and when you consider the stretch of 150 miles, you're taking into consideration that it's basically all of the people. You realize that Tiberius is over Rome at this time, but then God focuses on all the people in this particular area, and He begins to list those in authority in this particular area, and this is where John begins to take authority. It's almost like he just takes it, and he begins to say, "These guys aren't your lord. This is your Lord, and behold, this is what the Lord says."

So, it reads this way,

(Luke 1:3) "And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance..."

Now, the emphasis, of course, is that he's declaring you to cleanse yourself so that you can think differently. The cleansing is that aspect of literally ceasing from your way of thinking. That's why the word "repentance" is there, and once again has the root word "mind" in it. The word "mind" is actually in the word "repentance," which means "to think." So, the emphasis of the word is that you need

to think differently. The context is that the world has its leaders. It has its people that are in charge and all the things that they pursue and all the things that they go after. This is what they say life is all about and John the Baptist comes on the scene. He's coming from the wilderness, and he goes, "It's not about that at all. It's about something totally different." And it's one of the reasons why he has to come from a perspective of not being influenced by the world. That's why he has to come in from the wilderness. I think one of the great benefits of the wilderness is that you're not going to depend on man. You begin to talk to God a lot and you begin to depend on Him and it's the difficulties in our lives that really bring us close to Him. So, here he begins to proclaim this sense of, "Look, you need to wash your minds." And you have this wonderful picture of the whole body being washed. We use the phrase, "being whelmed over by water." Baptism is just a total immersion because look, if you're going to completely change, you have to do the whole body, right? That's the reason why the sprinkle thing doesn't work. It has to be the whole body. But anyway, the emphasis is the immersion. The point is that you to wash yourself

from the way of thinking of the world. Whether it's your hands, whether it's your legs, feet, where they go, whether it's your mind, what they think or the eyes, what they see; these things cannot be a part of your life.

You see the words there, “forgiveness of sins.” (Luke 3:3) You have to have the forgiveness of sins. It's not actually the word “forgiveness” that he's emphasizing here, but a sense of release. Let me just say this, when you and I come to a point where we go, “I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to think this way anymore.” There comes a release. Actually, this word that he uses for forgiveness is a word that's used as a prisoner is released from prison, and you become released from those desires by virtue of saying, “I don't want to do it anymore.” So, it's kind of introductory into the preparation for the kingdom. It's what brings us to Christ. The things in our life we begin to see, like we see these rulers and we go, “What a mess.” And we come to a point, and we go, “I don't want to do that.” And John goes, “That's how we prepare. That's where it starts. ‘I don't want to do that. I don't want to be there. I don't want to go there. I don't

want that to be a part of my life.’” That's the introduction to Christ. Then you come and you see that which we begin to fall in love with, and it is the voice of Christ calling to us. This is a voice that is calling in the wilderness.

So, the passage says he begins to baptize in this particular region, and baptism of release; if I can put it this way.

(Luke 3:4) “as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS...””

You know, you begin to hear that voice, and you follow it. You don't even know why, but you know that you don't want to go that way. You know you don't want to go the way of the world. You can see all of the hurts and all of the pain that come from this. So, now somebody comes on scene, and they go, “We have a better way and it's the way of God.” And you can just feel how refreshing that is, if you think about it.

Scripture tells us that there is this voice, and in Hebrews 3:7, as we oftentimes quote, starts off this way,

“Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

(Hebrews 3:8) DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS...”

In John 10, we hear that wonderful picture of the Messiah who is a shepherd. It's a great picture that is given to us. As He gives this picture, He begins to say, “My sheep hear My voice,” and you realize that yes, it is the wonderful words of life in the message, but it is the voice that we hear. I've oftentimes seen people give advice to somebody and sometimes people give advice kind of in a nonchalant way; sometimes people give advice with their finger out and they're shaking their finger at somebody, and you can watch the person that they're doing it to, and either they just want to ignore them, or they just don't have anything to do with them. But you get somebody that shares the same message and begins to pour out their heart that they love them, and you can watch the same message put tears in the eyes of the person that's receiving. What's the difference? The voice, and it's the voice of Christ, “My sheep hear My voice and they come.” John will say, “They actually recognize My voice.” It's not

like sheep are going, “Ok. So, did He say that we need to gather around and come to the fire, and then after that, we're going to break and go to another place?” They're not trying to work out what His words are. They're going, “This is the guy we follow because every time we follow this guy, He leads us beside the still waters. He restores our soul. He's the one that gives us the green pastures. This is the guy. We recognize His voice.” So, the emphasis in the passage is that there's a voice and the voice is so unique that it has to come from a place that's not from the city. It has to come from the wilderness; a voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Now, the passage that he quotes is coming out of Isaiah 40, and if you turn there with me, there is a context to this particular passage that I think is unique and one of the reasons why I'm having you turn specifically this time is because it actually makes reference to, “As it is written in the words of Isaiah.” There's a clear emphasis in this phrase that he wants you to understand the context of the proclamation of John the Baptist. So, John the Baptist is taking the words from Isaiah 40, and if you look,

(Isaiah 40:3) “A voice is calling,

“Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness...””

So, this is basically the passage that he's dealing with.

Now, the context is that it's coming on the heels of what Isaiah writes about Hezekiah, and to not go into all the details of the life of Hezekiah, but king Hezekiah, the king of Judah at this particular juncture, had been surrounded by the Assyrian army. Sennacherib being clearly the one that is in charge, and he realizes that there's just no way he's going to get out of this. Sennacherib has literally wiped out all the cities that are above them and all the cities that are around him. So, there's just no way he's going to get out of this. So, what he does is what any sane person would do, he falls on his face and cries to God. Basically, his prayer goes something like this, “I don't want to die.” On top of the fact that he gets an illness that is going to take his life. So, it's like two hits in one, and how is he going to get out of this? So, this is actually recorded here in Isaiah, and Chapter 37 and Chapter 38 goes into the details of that. Basically, he cries to God,

and he goes, "I'm too young to die." So, God answers his prayer, and God fundamentally says,

(Isaiah 38:6) "I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city."

Of course He gives him 15 more years, as it says in verse 5, but not only that, but "I'll protect you from this guy." Of course, we know what happened is that God sends one angel. It only takes one to slay 185,000 of the soldiers. So, this is kind of the setting. What's happened is that Hezekiah, in his prayers, is saying, "God, You're the one. We need to worship You. You're the one that saves." Everything is going well until you get to chapter 39. In Chapter 39, it's one of those days; everything's ok, and now, everything goes back to normal or goes back to wherever your desires are, and he just happens to get this interesting letter from the king of Babylon. The king of Babylon goes, "I heard you were sick and wow, I just felt really bad about that." Really? The king of Babylon? "But I really felt bad about that. So, I'm glad you're feeling better." Well, bottom line, if you understand the context, the king could care less about how Hezekiah is feeling,

what he's happy about is that the king of Assyria has been whooped. See, that's what he's really excited about, because Assyria had been attacking Babylon and actually history tells us that Sennacherib had a plan to wipe out Babylon. Now, 185,000 of his people and then shortly after that, Sennacherib is going to die at the hands of his own kids. So, what is being thought of here by the king of Babylon is, "These guys have some power. I don't know what it is, but it's kind of a good luck charm. I'm going to kiss up to him." So, he does, and lo and behold, it works. The question is, why would Hezekiah be happy about this letter from the king of Babylon? And there's only one answer to that, because he wanted to be liked by the world. There's only one answer that.

So, he gets this letter, and it says,

(Isaiah 39:2) "Hezekiah was pleased..."

Verse 1 talks about the fact that he gets the letter, and verse 2 gives the reaction of Hezekiah, and he goes, "I really like this guy," King of Babylon. Now, what he doesn't know and what will be told to him is, "Babylon was going to come in and wipe you guys out." So, the very

guy he's courting is going to be the guy that probably within 50 years is going to come in and just wipe out that whole region and take the children of Israel into captivity. This has been the way that things have been going with Israel all along which is very interesting. What's the tendency of Israel when they get in trouble? They go down to Egypt. In fact, one of the things that's said in Isaiah 31 is, "Don't go down to Egypt. Don't put your trust in Egypt." That's man putting his trust in man. That would be like going to Tiberius. Tiberius doesn't even have his own act together. What makes you think he's going to help you? Everything is capricious with these guys. If in fact they help you, it'd have to be the end of God because they're not thinking in those terms. They're thinking in terms of self-preservation themselves, whether it be pilot or Herod or whatever. The same thing is true with all the nations, and what's also interesting is if you've read the Book of Isaiah, you go back to Isaiah 7 and you have this king by the name of Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, and the Syrians are attacking him, and he's being invaded and God goes, "Just call on Me. I'll take care of them for you." And Ahaz goes, "I'm not going to ask You. I'll go to Assyria." So,

he goes to Assyria. Well, Assyria now is the very nation that surrounded Hezekiah and is about to kill him. So, the pattern is, “we keep trusting the same people that want to kill us.” And that's basically what Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 11:20, “You want to put your trust in people that take advantage of you.” And we go, “Yeah, that sounds like a good idea.” So, when this passage then comes in, is when the prophet comes to Hezekiah, and he goes, “You made a big mistake by inviting this guy in your house.” And he basically says, “What have you done?” And he goes, “Well, when he came to my house, I wanted to show him all my treasures. So, I took him into this treasure house, and I took him in this. I showed him the temple's treasure.” And I can just see the king going, “Cha-ching. We'll be here shortly.” So, the prophet goes, “You know what's going to happen; this guy's going to come in and take your stuff” and he prophesies that. And Hezekiah goes, “When is that going to happen?” He goes, “Well, probably not in your lifetime.” He goes, “Ok, then I'm not concerned about it.”

So, it says,

(Isaiah 39:6) “Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,” says the LORD.

(Isaiah 39:7) ‘And some of your sons who will issue from you...’

Of course, we know that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were royalty.

“And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

(Isaiah 39:8) Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “For there will be peace and truth in my days.”

When you have a king that thinks that way, you can't help but feel like maybe they're not looking out for your interest. This has been the whole thing. The other nations don't look out for their interest and the kings that they've had haven't looked out for their interest.

So, this text then starts off this way,

(Isaiah 40:1) ““Comfort, O comfort My people,” ...”

Can you hear it? Why would He say it at this point?

Because there has been no comfort, there's been no sense of somebody looking out for their best interests and somebody caring for them.

(Isaiah 40:3) “A voice is calling,

“Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness...”

Once again, a way of talking about this inhabited place that is only fit really for feeding flocks.

“... “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert...””

This arid place where not only does it give a picture of water being basically void, but it gives a picture of a place that continues to darken. Which once again, is very interesting because it's really conveying that it's through the difficulty of your life that God begins to speak to you. When things grow dark, you begin to listen.

It cries out in verse 3,

“...Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.”

Now, what it's actually saying is you need to, and it's the preparation of getting ready for the Messiah coming. When a king would come to any particular setting they knew he was going to go on a certain road. They didn't want his carriage or whatever he was on to go through bumps. So, they would go on the road and do everything they could to make it smooth because that was their way of welcoming and that was their way of saying that "We revere you." The word "smooth" here in this particular passage is dealing with somebody that is thinking straight, which is very interesting; more specifically, somebody that is sincere or truthful or genuine. So, the way that we prepare for God coming in our lives is we get real. Of course, I think one of the great benefits of the wilderness is that it helps us get real with our lives.

It says,

(Isaiah 40:4) "Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low..."

In other words, those that are humble will be exalted; those that are proud will be made low.

“... And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley.”

So, he talks about the rough ground and the rough, rugged terrain and what he's dealing with is all those things which will keep you from coming to the Messiah. Things like the mountains, which are intimidating. Things like the deceptive, as he says, the rugged terrain is really dealing with the precarious steps which would actually make you fearful at times, but it's also deceptive. You don't know if this is going to be a safe step or not. Then, the last one is that which would impede in any way you coming to Christ. The point is that if there's anything in your life that would keep you from coming to Christ, get rid of it. Clear it out. There's a thing of deception that you've hung on to. Get rid of it. It's part of that cleansing. It's part of getting ready he says because this is where salvation is going to come from. You're going to need to listen to only Him. The world is full of voices. There are bad voices calling out, trying to make us think the wrong way. God says, “You've got to think so different that it's like it's from a different planet.” And this is where you

and I have to really surrender all of our thoughts because so much of the world's thinking is so counter to Christ. You just put a celebrity up here and “Now, I'll follow.” If you follow because a celebrity is up here, you follow for the wrong reason. So, it really becomes deceitful, doesn't it? So, God is dealing with our hearts and what a wonderful message as we begin to see this. And I basically run out of time as we come to this passage. But I'm just reminded of this wonderful message of this voice that is calling out and I just have to be willing to listen to the voice and not let all the noise of the world come in.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You and we ask You to change our hearts. Lord, we're being bombarded by a lot of different thoughts and a lot of different ways, and we're convinced by the world that their way is right. Yet we see the ramifications of them going their way. Deep down inside, there's something, even a voice that says to us, “This is not true.” And then when we hear Your voice, we hear the words of forgiveness, and we hear the words of

compassion, and we hear the words of righteousness. “Finally, somebody is going to do the right thing.” That's what we are in love with. We just have to be careful not to think that it's going to come from a majestic place. For, You have continually shown us that it's either with the shepherd's or in a manger, or in the wilderness or someplace that is certainly not a part of this world. Lord, help us attune to the voice rather than the fanfare.

Your head's bowed and your eyes closed. The Lord is talking to You. He wants you to get real with Him. I know a lot of people say a lot of things and a lot of notable authors perhaps say wonderful things that are oftentimes very alluring. Perhaps they even say things like, “You can be wealthy always on this world and that it's about making yourself a friend of the world.” There are liars and deceivers out there, and if in fact they align with the way that the world thinks, it's an obvious sign that they are lying. You need to stop pursuing the wrong things and just clear out your head and ask yourself, “What is truth?” What you're going to find is truth comes in places that you never would expect them to. It may be from a person

that seems to be virtually a nobody, but you can hear the words of life. Listen to them. God's calling you.