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Luke

Chapter 3 - A Different Kind of Authority A Conviction Demanding Change (vs. 7-14)

Luke 3:7-14: 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? “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. “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.” And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?” 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.” And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he

said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 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."

So, Luke brings us back to the common man. This is not a confusing gospel. The truth of Scripture is really not confusing. In fact, in many ways it's almost over simplistic. "What do You want me to do?" Do the right thing. I mean, how confusing is that? I grew up in church and I think one of the things that I wrestled with in growing up in church is that you would obviously from time to time, see things that were not appropriate, and you would see men in office that probably shouldn't be there. As you watch what has been placed before you and you hear the things of Scripture, you begin to think, "It doesn't match. It

doesn't pan out. What they're saying doesn't look like anything that I've seen.” And I think it was one of the reasons why I thought the whole process of even thinking about being in ministry or in church at all. Obviously, with my folks they were bulwarks and faithful in doing what they did. Nevertheless, you see all these other influences and before long you're beginning to question the legitimacy of this whole thing, church and faith and God. “Does He exist?”

I was thinking of that wonderful passage in Hebrews 11, without faith it's impossible to please God. You must first believe that He is. I think one of the problems that I see and have seen in these latter days is that people like to define God. They like to decide what they think God is, and then they put Him in whatever box they have, and they declare Him as thinking this way. One of the things I truly appreciate about John, as he comes on the scene is he goes, “You need to prepare the way of the Lord.” The point is that God's not fitting in your box. You need to get in line with His way of thinking. It doesn't usually work out well in audiences when you begin to preach what God

says to do. I mean, look, He either exists or He doesn't, right? And if He does, then He exists as who He is, not as who you think He is, and what's important is what He says and His way, not yours. It's not you trying to in some way get your way to fit into His way of thinking, but you're having to give up everything. You're saying, "If this is true, I've got to change." And this is fundamentally the message of John the Baptist. He comes on the scene, and He goes, "If this is true, you need to change because the Lord is coming." I believe that. I actually believe that God exists. I actually believe that He has a way that is right, goes far beyond my way of thinking. That's why when we come together, when we begin to open up Scripture, I give you certain texts. I do that because I have no idea what the right way is unless it's in here. I know that many times being fallible as an individual as a human, I might even misread this, but it certainly isn't my desire, and I believe that part of the Spirit of God within anyone is that they desire truth. Scripture tells us in John 14, 15, 16 that the Spirit of God is truth, and that truth rings true in your hearts. The message that we have is not something that we superficially in some way stir up excitement or joy or

whatever. The message itself stirs it up. If you embrace truth, God will begin to change your heart. We actually believe that the gospel is the power of God. The gospel; the word of truth. So, proclaiming the gospel clearly begins to move the hearts of men and women and cause them to change. That God would choose somebody that's living up in the mountains; clearly, away from all of the city influences and the ivory towers of man that He would call a guy by the name of John and declare the message through him is a very interesting point. That He would come to fishermen instead of the great academia nuts. Instead, He would come to those that were just plain average Joes. I think one of the things that encouraged me as I began to meet genuine people, as I began to see that the Spirit of God in those people is not a sense of superficial happiness, but it's a sense of genuineness and realness that these people actually do love God. They actually believe He exists. They believe that He can change and has changed their life, and they do what is right because God tells them to, because in their heart of hearts they know that if God tells them to do something, it's the perfect thing for them to do. It's the best thing for

them to do. They actually believe all this, and by virtue of that faith, they begin to walk in the spirit of genuineness. What does the Holy Spirit look like in somebody? A person's real and they're real about their love for God. There's nothing fake about them, and they're not necessarily going to be somebody that's smiling or laughing all the time, but you're going to talk about God and well, from time to time you're going to see them tear up; other times you're going to see them get elated, but you're going to see them respond emotionally about the things of God because it's real in their life. So, in many respects, the Spirit of God in you and me is the spirit of realness. He is the Spirit of truth. He is the Spirit of what is real. I don't picture Jesus walking around trying to entertain people, but everything that He did, He did in and genuineness truth.

I think this is the reason why in John 4, when Jesus is talking to this woman at the well, He goes, "You know what God is looking for is those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. This is what He's looking for and that's why I decided to talk to you because you seem to be

real.” And all the way through the Gospel of John, you see Jesus approaching real people that are just wanting something real. When John comes on the scene, he begins to proclaim, “You guys are going to have to think differently.” And I think one of the reasons why they need to think differently is because one of the greatest enemies to our faith is religion. We put on airs; we try to impress people. I've oftentimes loved that one passage in Ecclesiastes where he goes, “Don't be too righteous. Why should you ruin yourself?” You know people are walking around with their nose in the air and on a day like this, they're going to drown. I'm very concerned about them. But you think about just the genuineness of the hearts that God is calling, and you see what He's looking for. So, John begins, and he says, “You guys need to repent.” Once again, the word “repent” literally means “you must think differently.” When I think about this, I can't help but go all the way back because the things that he's quoting, this is not a new message. This is the same message it's always been. Here's another pet peeve that I have. People get in the pulpit, and they go, “We've got something new. We've got a new ministry.” I'm going, “New? Our message

has nothing to do with new. It has to do with what has always been. That's God, and He's immutable. He never changes. His message never changes, and that's what's an anchor for my soul. If things were always changing, what is it you put your hope in? But we have a message both sure and steadfast, an anchor for our soul that just is immutable, never changes.

When you look at a passage like Isaiah, if you look with me in Isaiah 29; if I could just preface this text from Luke with some of these passages in the Old Testament, which remind us that people have a tendency to just not be real. And if you were to ask, "How can I get ready for the Lord?" God would tell you, "Ok, let's be real with Me" because when we look at passages like 1 John 1, he says, "Ok, if you're going to say you have no sin, you're just lying, and the truth is not in you." You and I know that you can't have a relationship with somebody that's lying.

(Isaiah 29:13) "Then the Lord said,
"Because this people draw near with their words
And honor Me with their lip service,
But they remove their hearts far from Me,

And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.”

Do you want to know why church is so boring for a lot of people? Because that's what it is. It's just a bunch of tradition, regiment, ritual, things learned; memorized, perhaps. I still say, and I know that people are going to misunderstand what I'm saying, but I don't think you should memorize Scripture. I think you should fall in love with it, and you won't forget it. I have found that sometimes when you put the cart before the horse, that you go into this rote thing, “I know this message in Scripture.” Well, good for you, but has it changed anything? God's wanting to know if you love Him. So, you could say all day long, “I love You. I love You. I love You.” God’s going, “I'm not convinced.”

In Isaiah 51, if you look in that particular chapter, you begin to see that God is calling upon us to listen. The point is that this message that he's proclaiming isn't new, and he keeps telling people to go back to the original. Jesus will say this when different ones come up to Him and they go, “Ok. So, this divorce thing, what should we

do?” He goes, “Well, let's go back to the beginning. From the beginning, it was not so. God created man and woman.” So, He continues to go back to the beginning. We're not talking about a new message here. This is why, if in fact you go back to literally even your conscience; if it hasn't been seared, you'll know what the right thing to do is.

(Isaiah 51:1) “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,

Who seek the LORD:

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

And to the quarry from which you were dug.

(Isaiah 51:2) “Look to Abraham your father

And to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain...”

What is he doing in the passage? He's going back to the original. The message hasn't changed. I mean, Paul, when he writes about faith, what does he do in Romans 4? He says, “Let's go back to Abraham, and Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him as righteousness.” He goes back to the fundamentals. So much of this is just so clear that it would seem like it'd be impossible for it to be

blurred, to become nebulous, but the fact of the matter is religion does a good job doing that.

If you look with me in Jeremiah 5, here's an appalling thing. I know it's an appalling thing because the text actually says this is an appalling thing.

(Jeremiah 5:30) “An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:

(Jeremiah 5:31) The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority...”

That is to say, not Scripture, but “This is what I think.” I think one of the most disturbing things for me is when I begin to hear people talk to me about, “Well, I think God does this. I think God does this. I think He's going to do this” and I'm going, “Where are you getting your information from?” It's from that hollow melon over your head and you're thinking that your imagination is greater than who God is? I don't understand that.

The point of the passage is,

(Jeremiah 5:31) “The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;

And My people love it so!”

One of the reasons why they love it is actually written in 2 Timothy 4; it's because quite frankly, they tickle their ears. So, they go and accumulate for themselves teachers, in accordance with their own desire. “I like what that guy's saying because that guy is talking just like the way I live, and I like that.” Why do people go to different churches? They gravitate towards what they love. That's what they do.

So, all the way through Jeremiah 6 as well, he begins to talk about, “Well, who can I talk to if you love just listening to things that you like listening to and the sins that you love doing?” If you're drawn to those kinds of things and you follow people that talk just like you feel, then you're not really seeking what God thinks.

The statement is,

(Jeremiah 6:10) “To whom shall I speak and give warning
That they may hear?”

Behold, their ears are closed

And they cannot listen.

Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them..."

"Oh, don't quote me Scripture. Don't tell me Scripture. I don't want to hear it."

It goes on and says, unfortunately,

(Jeremiah 6:13) "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them,

Everyone is greedy for gain,

And from the prophet even to the priest

Everyone deals falsely."

That's religion. Wouldn't you say that's religion? Yeah.

(Jeremiah 6:14) "They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially..."

They say, "Everything's ok. Everything's ok." It's not ok. You need to get right with God. "Oh, don't talk to me about sin. That offends me." Yeah, but it's the sin that's causing your depression. There's a reason why you have to take that medication.

It says goes on and says,

(Jeremiah 6:16) “Thus says the LORD,
“Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient
paths...”

Watch how simplistic this is,

“... Where the good way is...”

Don't you love the way that's put? “Where's the good way?”

“... and walk in it;

And you will find rest for your souls.”

Do you understand the two points? “Where is the good way?” First of all, you're searching for it. The second part is, when you find it, you do it. It says, “Walk in it.” Do what it says. That's when you'll find rest. You'll find rest only when you do those things that God has called you to do. Unfortunately, Jeremiah 25 will go on to say, “The Lord has sent His servants, the prophets, again and again and again, but you have not listened to them.” God has given you the truth. He's telling you the way the life and we don't listen.

In Jeremiah 22, if you look with me at the very beginning, it reads this way,

(Jeremiah 22:1) “Thus says the LORD, “Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and there speak this word

(Jeremiah 22:2) and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, who sits on David’s throne, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates.

(Jeremiah 22:3) ‘Thus says the LORD...’”

Watch the simplicity of this,

“... “Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”

“If you do these things, I'll be in your presence.” We're not talking about a lot of sacrifices. We're not talking about dressing up like you're really righteous or anything like that. We're just saying, “Would you just do the right thing?” It's not confusing. It's the reason why John the Baptist is the guy to proclaim the message because he's

very straightforward and this message is very straightforward. You need to get your life right. Stop thinking the way you think because it's very selfish. Selfish is self-serving and quite frankly, what you first need to do above everything else is subjugate yourself to the Lord. That is to say, submit to the Lord. He's the one in charge.

(Luke 6:46) “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

So, you need to do what He says. “Now, why should I do that?” Well, once again, because you've made a mess of your life.

As you look at the very beginning of Luke 3, the reason it opens up the way that it does is it literally gives us a “who who's’ of misery as we were talking about earlier. So, though they have all these high positions and they've gone after him; Pilate was part of the equestrian order and worked hard to be one of the grandest soldiers.

Probably his desire was to be in the Senate and maybe even greater things beyond that. In his pursuit of doing those things, he finds himself in misery and finds himself not only not in the middle of politics but being hated in

the political realm. All that are listed within the passage, you're having broken homes; you're having people that are in misery. Of course, as we talked about last week, Tiberius is in reclusion at this particular juncture. He's hiding from people. So, we have a list of all those that have reached what we would call the pinnacle of position, and they found misery. Congratulations. This guy comes out of the wilderness, and he goes, "Let's do it God's way." And he uses the word "repent". "The Lord is coming." He gets very specific about this and what's also interesting is as the multitudes are coming, instead of him tickling their ears, he almost insults them. No, I have to say he does insult them. What is to be noted is that in the book of Matthew where it talks about John the Baptist proclaiming the message, he turns to the Pharisees and Sadducees and says, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come, you brood of vipers?" That's a bad thing to be, a "brood of vipers," in case you weren't sure about that. It says in Matthew that that he turned his speech to the Pharisees and Sadducees, not in Luke. One of the things that Luke is going to say is we all have that problem, though these greats are probably more prone to

this because power corrupts. Unfortunately, we all have a taste of a little bit of power in all of our lives.

I remember this one individual number of years ago that we felt was just the perfect person to work with children because they were always so gracious and outgoing to us adults. And I remember sitting back and they didn't know I was there, but I saw them working with their children and they were just tyrants towards those kids, and I'm going, "Ok. Everybody's looking for a stage to be a tyrant." If they feel safe and like they can in some way use whatever position they have, they're going to take it because it's our nature to take advantage of the positions that we have. Luke's going to convey that. Luke's going to turn to the average person, the most unlikely person, and he's going to say, "You have that tendency too."

So, if you look in the passage, it actually reads this way,

(Luke 3:7) "So he began saying to the crowds..."

You could actually translate that word "mob".

“... 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” is pretty descriptive when you consider that they say when the vipers come out, they immediately go their own way. They don't warm up to the mother and the parent is not responsible for them. Whatever happens, they go, and they have a tendency to bite each other, if in fact the one gets in the way of its food. So, immediately they're on each other. So, they have this sense of detachment as well as born with little or no relationship skills, if we can put it that way. All their poison is in their mouth. Which of course, that's where we do the most damage according to the book of James. They have a tendency to just if we can put it this way, think of themselves. They're only out for themselves. So, it's a perfect picture when you consider the damage that oftentimes people create just simply by pursuing whatever they want.

The way he goes on to describe, and of course obviously, his indictment is, “Somebody warned you, right, to flee

from the wrath?" And his point once again is that "You're not here because you love God. You're here because it's an advantage to you." Whether it's self preservation or perhaps in this sense, a place in which they could gain advantage. I've known people that have come to church just because they're seeing that this is an easy prey to fleece; an easy place to come and take advantage of people. You can have all kinds of people go to church for all sorts of different reasons, but his point is that "You're just coming in for self preservation for yourself and I know why you're here." You can actually see; it becomes visible in people's life before long. I would say the reason why is they start talking, up to a point, if they don't say anything, I have a real hard time knowing what they're thinking, but once they start talking, I go, "Ok." Because things like poison start coming out and you begin to realize this person's really bitter, and you begin to see that this is not somebody that loves God. This is somebody that has an agenda and they're trying to manipulate things. This is John's point. I mean, he's very to the point.

(Luke 3:8) “Therefore bear fruits...”

If you're ever confused about what fruit is, basically fruit is the effect, and I would even say the result of the faith that you have or the things that you believe in. So, fruit is visible signs.

When you look a little bit further in the passage, he talks about a good tree, and he talks about specifically good fruit within the text. The word that he uses for “good” is “*kalos*.” He doesn't use “*agathos*,” which is another word for good, but this particular word that he uses deals with something that is valuable and virtuous that is visibly seen. That's the word “fruit”. In other words, “bring forth something visible that I can see.” Once again, I know that people say, “Don't judge me, man.” And I get that, but your fruit's hanging. So, like Doctor Alwine says, we're not judges, but we are fruit inspectors, and we can't help but see what the reality is. The point is that if in fact you're a good tree, you'll bring forth obvious, virtuous things that are valuable to people; that are helpful, that build, that are benevolent, that actually bring people to Christ rather than tear them down. You'll actually produce good fruit.

(Luke 3:8) “Therefore bear fruits in keeping...”

That is to say, equal to what you proclaim that you believe. People say, “I believe God is love.” So, what do you think you should be doing? “God is forgiving.” You should be forgiving. I mean, all the things that you say you believe, are you pursuing the righteousness of God? Is there a love for the brethren? Build up the body; be devoted to one another. The Bible says, “Go and make disciples.” What are you doing? It doesn't necessarily mean that you're sitting down with somebody and you're explaining them all the exegetical things of Scripture. What it's basically saying is that you should be stimulating one another through love and good deeds, and you should be stimulating one another to love the Bible more. “Make disciples” means simply to make learners, and one of the ways that you make learners, as we were talking about in Genesis is you develop a palate. You actually create a taste, and if people see that you're in love with the Bible, it doesn't matter how astute, as far as your ability to understand the language is, but it has more to do with, “Do you really love this?” And people can see

that you have a love for it, and they can see that your desire is to do what it says. That's what he's talking about when he's talking about the fruit.

“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.”

It is interesting that Peter's name is peter which basically refers to a stone. But what he's saying is that your value doesn't come from your genealogy or any position that you have. It comes from the walk with Christ.

So, he gives this interesting example,

(Luke 3:9) “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit...”

Here again, valuable, virtuous, visible fruit.

“... is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

It's a very astute way of basically warning the people of Israel at that time in the area of Israel that they're not always going to have this opportunity.

There's a passage in Luke 13, if you look there with me, where the warning is so clear in this parable. Of course, the whole first few verses, verses 1-5 is fundamentally saying, "You need to repent." People say, "Well, something bad happened to this person." Jesus goes, "Yeah, you better repent." Because we always like to put, "Well, they must have been really bad." "Yeah, but you better repent," and He keeps coming back to us.

(Luke 13:6) "And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it..."

Something visible; something virtuous.

"... and did not find any.

(Luke 13:7) "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years..."

Which would fundamentally be the ministry of Jesus.

"... for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'

(Luke 13:8) “And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;

(Luke 13:9) and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”

Now, we know that within a few short years, all of Jerusalem was invaded by Titus and it was all cut down. There was not a stone left upon another, that the fulfillment of this was. They had the opportunity to respond and to change while not only John was in the making, but Jesus was proclaiming. In fact, it's very interesting that Jesus uses at least twice the phrase “brood of vipers” along with John, but they're being warned. Spiritual leaders in particular are being warned. Jerusalem is being warned. So, he says, “Ok, you haven't listened for the three years. We're going to put fertilizer on you.” What exactly is fertilizer? Well, I can tell you this, it's odious. It doesn't smell good, and I guess in some way, it's kind of embarrassing, but that's basically what He was saying, because He was going to bring the gospel through Gentiles. He was going to bring the gospel through these,

as they'll call them unlearned apostles which are basically a stench in their nostrils. God says, "We're going to have them sit around you, and you'll either take root with them or not." And I think the whole point of it is that God will oftentimes put us in very embarrassing humiliating circumstances to give us the last chance to humble ourselves because we wouldn't naturally humble ourselves, but God will somehow begin to, as He did with the apostles, demonstrate His great power. People are watching these fishermen and great powers coming from them, and that's an indictment. That's embarrassing because the religious leaders are going, "I don't have that power." You haven't seen that, and God begins to convict. Will they take the humility? Obviously, they didn't but the simplicity of the message is, there has to be a change.

Now, when you come to verses 10-14 in particular, what you have, to me, is this wonderful point that people begin to ask John, "What do we do?" And let me say this, John really hasn't done anything that fantastic to make them change. Let me put it another way. You would be hard pressed to find any text that says anything about any

miracle that John the Baptist performed. He didn't. I'll just make it really simple, He just proclaimed, "You guys better get right because Christ, God is coming. The Lord is coming. You better get right. You better change your way of thinking. Stop thinking like you do. Stop being selfish, self-centered; you turn to God." That's all he was basically saying. His conviction was so clear, and the Spirit of God was upon him so powerfully. We know that because even at his birth, the Holy Spirit was upon him, and we know, as Peter will say, the message itself is an act of the Spirit of God. So, the Spirit of God is so powerful, working in the lives of these people that they're coming up to him, and they're voluntarily confessing sins. Who does that? Usually, sometimes when people get caught, they'll say, "Ok. Ok. I took it." Sometimes they'll lie even when they get caught, but what we're talking about is that something has entered into this realm that is so powerful that these people are voluntarily coming and subjugating themselves to the will of God. It's not unlike Acts 2, where Peter proclaims this message and at the end of his message, they go, "What do we need to do to be saved?" And to me, that's the power of the messages itself. If

somebody is genuinely searching for truth, they're not going to be walking in church going, "I wonder what's in this for me." That's going to be the furthest thing from their mind. They're going to walk in the church and they're going, "What does God want me to do?" And they'll just do it.

So, the way it's put within the passage, it says,

(Luke 3:10) "And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?"

(Luke 3:11) 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."

The point of the matter and here again, the simplicity of this is you need to love people above things. That's pretty simple, isn't it? "What do we need to do? I'm so confused about the will of God. It's so complicated." Be nice to people.

When you think about the simplicity of the message, you can't help but think of Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require? Do good." And then he breaks it down. He says,

“Love kindness.” That's fundamentally what we're talking about here. “Do justice and walk humbly with God.” Not a complicated road. “What should we do?”

(Luke 3:12) “And some tax collectors...”

Now, who could get a tax collector to repent? The word actually I think is translated in some of your Bible, “publicans”. Publicans are basically fundamentally subcontractors. So, they would hire somebody to go get the taxes and they would tell them, “Ok, this is what they owe. Now, if you can get more out of them, go for it.” And these subcontractors make more money by pushing them for more.

The way that the passage reads is,

“And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”

(Luke 3:13) And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.””

That's a very simple passage, isn't it? He's not saying don't collect taxes, because of course, Romans 13 says you have to pay taxes. I think that's probably what we'd like to be

in the passage, but He says, “Just don't collect more than you've been asked to.” And really, what He's talking about in this is that you want to put what is right, justice above profit. There are going to be times in your life where you have to make decisions and, in your decisions, you say to yourself, “I think I can make some extra money here.” And God says, “Yeah, but is it right? Would it be the fair thing to do?” And you go, “Well, no, it wouldn't be.” Don't do it. How simple is that? Do justice. Do the right thing. Quit thinking about what is profitable in your life.

(Luke 3:14) “Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” ...”

I like that, “What about us?” because “Too bad for you guys. You've got to do the right thing, but what about us? Maybe we can do the wrong thing.”

“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...”

It's basically a misuse of your power. It's a misuse of your position, and what's interesting is when you're looking at these, you're dealing with publicans which are

subcontractors. So, they're really not the higher echelon of the tax collectors, and you're looking at the multitudes, and of course, they're obviously not in the high tier and you're looking at soldiers and they're just soldiers, but every one of them somewhere in their life will have a position that's a little bit higher than somebody else. Every one of them will have somewhere and sometime in their life an opportunity to take advantage of somebody. If I could put it this way, in the common man's realm, even you could be tempted by these things and his point is, don't use your position in any way to acquire money. It's fundamentally faith above force. It's faith above fraud, that you're actually trusting God to take care of you. That's why he actually uses the word in the passage "content"; "Be content." Contentment is believing that God gives you exactly what you need, and especially as you're being a soldier, you have a wage. Just take the wage. That's what God has given you. He doesn't want you to misuse your position.

So, the way it reads is,

“... And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely...””

Actually, what soldiers would do is they would obtain money by acting as informers because they were allowed to be in certain places. So, they would actually extort money from rich people because they heard certain things, and then they would go tell somebody else about what they heard, and they could actually make a lot of money. It'd be kind of like bribery, but it would be exhorting money from them.

So, he says, “... or accuse anyone falsely,” and as it ends, “be content with your wages.””

I was thinking about ultimately as we think of Christ and the cross, and when Christ was on the cross, Scripture says that they were casting lots for His garments. You see how the passage starts off, “The man who has two tunics is to share”? (Luke 3:11) The opposite of share would be taking, and here they are, taking from the One. That's all that He had on him, but they were gambling.

Finally, when you come into Luke 23:47, Luke records this particular incident, the centurion, that is to say the

soldier, looks up at the cross and he sees what has happened and he says, "Certainly, this man was innocent." Taken advantage of; accused falsely. "But certainly, this man was innocent." Our faith is not complicated. God is calling upon us to do the right thing. The fact of the matter is we haven't been doing the right thing. In many respects, we're so used to doing the wrong thing that we get a little confused because we've almost convinced ourselves that the wrong thing is ok. We've compromised, but the word of God is just not compromising. The point of the matter is I shouldn't be trying to make God fit into my lifestyle. I should be coming and going, "This is God. I need to be getting my life right with Him." What's the advantage of that? Well, let's talk about the disadvantage of going the wrong way. You're going to be in misery. The advantage of following Him is joy and peace; all the wonderful benefits that God has in store for you; the unity of the body. Start doing the right thing. It's not a complicated message.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we give You thanks for the simplicity of John the Baptist as he comes onto the scene and he begins to cry, "Prepare the way of the Lord." As he tells us, "You need to think differently. Your ways have been wrong." That's why you're so miserable. That's why you're not happy. And the wonderful thing is that when we start doing what You tell us to do, we find ourselves joyful, but not in a fake or superficial way. We actually mean it and the Spirit of truth is actually living within us to where our life is not a show, it's a reality.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, we're just asking you to come into simplicity of the message. Turn to the right way. Turn to truth. Everybody in this world seems to be faking it today. They're not happy. You come to this body; we're not trying to wow you; we are pointing you to the one who can change your life. I can't do it, but I know He will. I don't have the answers, but I know He does, and I don't have the power to give you love, but I know He will if you'll just get real with Him. You and I could talk all day long about what Scripture says, but if

you don't do it, it won't matter at all. There needs to be visible, virtuous, valuable change in your life; truth. As you begin to walk in the things that God tells you to do or as Jesus will say, the wise men built upon a rock, upon a foundation, and you ask, "What is the foundation?" And He goes, "Truth." They actually did what God told them to do. If you do that, you'll find the reality of Christ in your life.