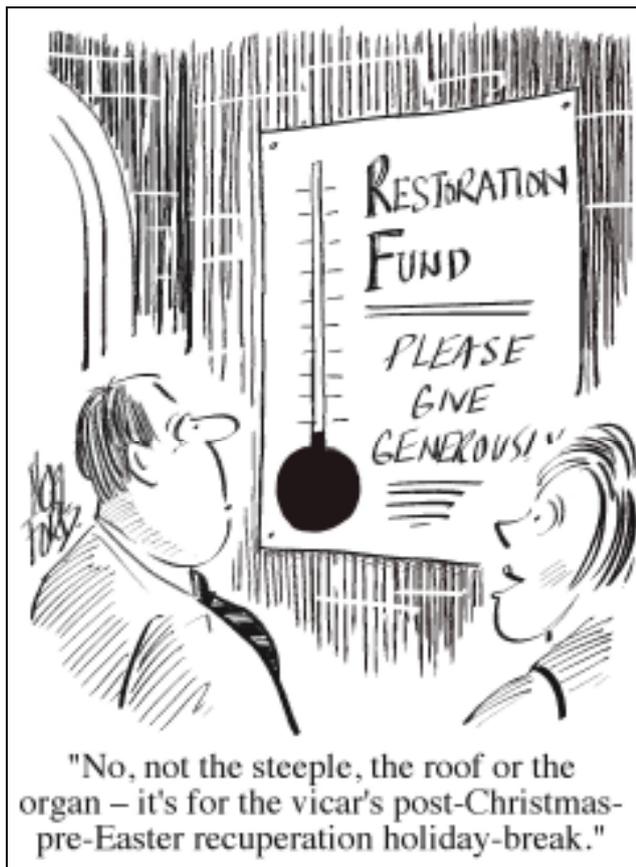


Luke Chapter 3.1-37 – a Study Guide

Martin Bird

This chapter starts with John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. Then it looks at the baptism of Jesus, and ends with Jesus' genealogy through Joseph's line. These verses were selected as they come directly before Jesus in the wilderness – something we will be thinking about in March.

The way this chapter opens tells us a lot about Luke and the way he writes. He starts off by telling us when the events happen - Verse 1 says "*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar*". Luke likes to place the events in his gospel in history. He like the reader to have a point of reference to go back to if they want to check up on whether what he is saying is right.



This way of writing led to historians trying to disprove Luke's version of events in the book of Acts, and, by extension, in his gospel too. One of these, a historian by the name of Sir William Ramsey, despite wanting to disprove Luke's writings, simply concluded from his studies that Luke was an historian of the first

rank! This puts this chapter into some context. If Luke says that it happened in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, then it would appear that we can take it as read that that was indeed when it happened. In being so thorough with dating his writing, Luke appears to be saying that if the reader can prove the dates are correct, then why would he have lied about the important thing – the life and ministry of Jesus?

This chapter then has a quote from Isaiah which points to the fact that someone was coming to prepare the way for Jesus. We are left in no doubt from what Luke writes, that this was to be John. This is vital. It is Luke saying that what it said in Isaiah has come true in John, and, because of this, we can see that Jesus is the messiah. He is the one that John was preparing the way for, as is clearly seen when we get to the baptism of Jesus towards the end of the chapter.

After this, we are told by Luke that John uses some powerful words to try to help people see the error of their ways. He calls the crowd a brood of vipers. He warns the crowd that if they are not saved, then they will not inherit eternal life. Verse 9 says, "*The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*"

The crowd is being told to turn away from their evil ways and turn to God. We need to take this on board for our lives. We too need to turn away from temptation and evil, and let Jesus save us. If we live for Jesus, then we must turn our back on sin. This is what the crowd is being told.

The crowd asks what they can do and John tells them to share their goods and food with each other. This is another good analogy for us today. Do we share our things with others? Maybe. Do we share our food with others? Possibly. What about our money? What about our love? What about

our faith? We cannot pick and choose what we share. We must share it all.

So, back to the text. In verses 15 – 20 two things happen. Firstly we are left in no doubt how important Jesus is. Luke lets us know, by sharing what John says. Look at verses 15 and 16 below. I think they rather speak for themselves:

“The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all. “I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

Jesus is still baptising with the Holy Spirit today. Just as he did it then, so he has baptised all of us who are baptised today with the same Holy Spirit. Are we open to receive it? Are we ready for what it might mean? John was. Luke tells us that John was so sure of his ground he rebuked Herod because of his adultery and for all the other evil things he had done. He was not backward in coming forward! Herod needed to hear it, so that he had a chance to repent and give his life to Jesus. All he actually did, as Luke tells us in verse 20, was to lock John up. In the end, this led to John’s death.

In the final part of the chapter, we are told of the baptism of Jesus and Luke tells us that when he was baptised, a voice came from heaven and said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” This, then, leaves us no room to doubt. Jesus IS the Son of God. He is the Messiah, the Christ. Luke is saying to the reader, “This is what happened. Do you believe me?” Well, do we? If we don’t, then the rest of the gospel story makes little sense. If we don’t start out believing that Jesus is the Son of God, then the fact he was crucified and the resurrected actually doesn’t make a blind bit of difference to anything. Where do you stand? Is Jesus the Messiah for you? Is He the Son of God?

In verse 23, Luke makes a point of telling us that Jesus was about 30 years old when he

started his ministry. He is the only Gospel writer to tell us this. Why is this? And why is it so important? It is another way to see Luke’s attention to detail. It is not necessarily important to know Jesus’ age when he started his ministry – it is more important to know and understand what he did in that ministry. Yet Luke tells us his age. It is Luke again saying, “Look, I have all the details. You can try to disprove what I say, but you won’t manage it.”

The last thing we are left with in this chapter is the Genealogy of Jesus through the line of Joseph. There are many things we could take out of this, but in his book “Luke for Everyone”, Tom Wright says this, *“Together the baptism story and the family tree tell us where Jesus has come from, who he is, and where he is going.”*

This is the crux of Chapter Three of Luke – it tells us Jesus has come from God, that he IS the Son of God, and that he was going to minister to people, both in Luke’s time, and now. Jesus’s period of ministry does not end when he leaves the earth at the beginning of Acts – it continues in all of us as we live our lives for him, and tell people about the Good News of Jesus.

