



“Confronted”  
Luke 3:1-20

**Idea:** An encounter with the Lord is always coupled with a choice to make.

**Intro:** Confrontations are a normal and healthy part of life. They present opportunities to make a change, yet most people do not like or enjoy confrontation, which is understandable. By definition, a confrontation is a hostile or argumentative meeting or situation between opposing parties or ideas. It forces a decision and the intentional movement in a certain direction. For this reason, there are many people who prefer to label themselves as being non-confrontational. They are passive and do not want to rock the proverbial boat by making decisions that affect the future of others or even themselves.

Confrontations, however, are inescapable and for our good. For example, when you go in for a routine check-up, and the doctor shares the results of the examination, you are confronted with information and choices to make. When you look in the mirror and no longer like what you see, you are confronted with information and a choice. When you go through an evaluation process at work, you are confronted with information and a choice. These are just three examples that we routinely experience. There are myriads of others.

Confrontations have been a reality from the beginning of time. In fact, we discover them on every page of the Bible. For example, in Exodus 3, Moses is living his life outside of God’s purpose for him. He has been a fugitive, living in a foreign land for forty years. Then one day he met God, speaking from a burning bush. In that moment, Moses was confronted with information and a choice. God had seen the affliction of Israel and heard their cries for help. Moses was being sent to deliver them from Pharaoh. We see another confrontation in Exodus 14 as Pharaoh and the Egyptians pursue Israel through the Red Sea. They had experienced God’s sovereign power through the ten plagues that destroyed Egypt. Nonetheless, as Egypt stood on the shore and watched Israel pass through the Red Sea on dry land, they chose to chase after God’s people to their own doom.

Pharaoh was confronted with information about God and a choice. This kind of confrontation is healthy and normal. God graciously makes Himself and His will known to us, and in that moment, we are confronted with a choice to make. This kind of confrontation is what we find in Luke 3 as the public ministry of John the Baptist is launched. Through his powerful and prophetic preaching, the people of Israel are prepared for the Messiah. Setting under John’s teaching, the people are confronted with God’s truth. As we move on in our study of Luke’s Gospel, I want us to see that an encounter with the Lord is always coupled with a choice to make. We are confronted.

Read Luke 3:1-20.

**Inquiry:** Chapter 2 ended with Luke telling us Jesus increased in stature, wisdom, and favor. Silence envelops the first thirty years of the lives of both Jesus and John. The only exception is the brief story of Jesus' visit to the Temple when He was twelve. What we know from those years must be deduced from their birth narratives and the related prophecies. In the case of John, he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (1:15) and leaped at the sound of Mary's voice (1:41). He also was a Nazirite and lived in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance (1:80).

According to Luke, John's public ministry began in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar. The historical markers provided here indicate that John began preaching about AD 27-29. They, however, do more than just provide marks on the timeline. By outlining the historical leaders at the time, Luke is describing the dark political ambience of the Roman and Palestinian governments. The names of Tiberius, Pilate, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias evoke wickedness and intrigue. Also, the religious names of Annas and Caiaphas project a degenerate priesthood. Annas had been the high priest from AD 6-15. He was then followed by his four sons in succession. They were followed by Annas' son-in-law Caiaphas. According to R. Kent Hughes, "The mention of their priesthood as one indicates a serpentine nepotism and an evil concentration of power."

It is against this dark political and religious backdrop that "*the word of God came to John...in the wilderness*" (3:2). He is presented as a classic prophet, called of God in the wilderness and dressed in radical attire (Mark 1:6). His very appearance in the desert was a call to repentance. In fact, repentance was the message he preached. Luke tells us he proclaimed, "*a baptism of repentance*" (3:3). We should not understand this to mean that he called people to be baptized for forgiveness of sins. No, John called the people to acknowledge their sin and repent of it. The acceptance of his baptism was an indication they had confessed and repented of their sins. Now, for those who might think we Baptists are reading into John's message our own theological interpretation, it might be good to know that John's message was understood by everyone who heard him then. Josephus, the early Jewish historian, clarified John and his baptism by stating:

"He was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety toward God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior."

John was a powerful preacher. The anointing of the Spirit of God rested on him and his preaching, so much so that great crowds came out to hear him and to be baptized. His preaching style is interesting. He seems to have had only one good sermon. He preached the gospel, calling people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was not clever or cute. Instead, he was bold and straightforward. He was not satisfied with seeing people become more religious. He wanted lost sinners to find forgiveness and new life in the Messiah, and he wanted to see evidence of their new life in how they lived and treated others.

John's powerful preaching brought fame, so people began to wonder if he was the Messiah they were anticipating (3:15). There was and had been no greater preacher/prophet than him. Rather than relishing in the attention he was getting, John pointed the people toward the Messiah who was soon to go public. He debased his own ministry to highlight the superiority of Christ's ministry (3:16).

During those few years of public ministry, thousands of people responded in faith and repentance to John's preaching. Their lives were radically changed by the gospel. Not everyone, however, responded in faith and repentance. Luke records how Herod imprisoned John for his confrontation of the tetrarch's sin. In this passage we see how people are confronted by God and His gospel. We learn that an encounter with the Lord is always coupled with a choice to make. Therefore, it is important we understand four truths about this kind of confrontation.

## **1. The gospel's confrontation brings an awareness of God's presence.**

As John preached a baptism of repentance message, the people were confronted with God's presence rather than John's. They heard God's word, not John's (vs. 2). Here we learn that when a lost sinner is confronted with the gospel message, he or she is made aware of God's presence. It does not matter if the person is a middle-aged dad, a teenage girl, or a young boy; when a sinner is confronted with the gospel, an awareness of God's presence becomes a reality.

This awareness is a beautifully frightening experience because we rightfully see God for who He is. For Moses at the burning bush, he felt the holiness of God and his own lack of holiness and was "*afraid to look at God*" (Ex 3:6). Isaiah in the presence of God referred to himself as "*lost*" and "*unclean*" (Is 6:5). Many times, there is a flood of emotions that accompany this new awareness. The person is in awe of God's greatness and grace, while at the same time in dread over his or her own sinfulness. For this reason, Luke connects John's preaching ministry (3:4-6) to Isaiah 40:3-5. He is the forerunner of the Messiah, so when the people were confronted by his gospel preaching, they were confronted with the presence of God.

I remember the day I surrendered my life over to Jesus. The Word of God, specifically 1 John 5:12, had never been more real to me. I felt the Lord's presence as He drew me to Himself. I have often said of that day, "There was nothing else I could do other than give my life to Jesus." Why? How could that be? It is because I was in the presence of God. What other posture than surrender does one take when you know you are in the presence of God?

This leads us to a second truth.

## **2. The gospel's confrontation brings an awareness of one's sin.**

John was confrontational in his preaching style. He was not naïve about the depravity of the human heart. Many people came to hear him preach. Some were truly seeking God. Their hearts had been stirred by God's Spirit, and they were responding in faith to His Word. Others, though, were merely religious. They sought the forms of worship rather than the object of worship. They wanted to associate with godly people, thinking it would make them acceptable to God. Therefore, they presented a façade of belief, repentance, and goodness. It is to these religion seekers that John said, "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" (3:7).

John made sure his hearers understood that you can be religious and be lost. You can know the stories of the Bible, quote verses of Scripture, and participate in worship yet still miss heaven. How can this be? It is because, while those practices are good and helpful, they do not remove a person's sin. The Bible calls us to acknowledge our own sin.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

– Romans 3:23

John called his audience to acknowledge their sin before holy God. He even warned them about the judgment they were already under. "*The axe is laid to the root of the tree*" (3:9). God in His judgment will not cut off a few branches; He will cut down the entire tree. It was a call for Israel to return as a nation to God, lest they be forsaken. It is a call for us to turn to God, lest we be destroyed.

*For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a*

Are you aware of your own sin? There is a third truth.

## **3. The gospel's confrontation brings a desire for repentance.**

Luke's linking of John's preaching to the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-5 helps us understand repentance. Read Luke 3:4-6. Seven hundred years before John, the prophet Isaiah told us there would come a man who would clear a path and make things ready for the coming of the Messiah. The valleys would be filled, mountains leveled, and the crooked places made straight. Do not get lost in the metaphor. The Lord is not interested in transforming physical land. The metaphor refers to a construction project taking place in the human heart. It reflects the widespread custom that when an eminent ruler was about to visit a city, the citizens would construct a smooth, broad road so he could enter the city with due pomp and dignity.

John calls for readiness in the people. This readiness boils down to repentance from sin, which makes perfect sense. When a sinner is confronted by the gospel message and made aware of God's holy presence there is immediately an awareness of personal sin before holy God. That sinner understands that God, the Emperor of his or her life, rightly belongs on the throne of the heart. The individual also understands that sin and self currently reside on that throne. Therefore, a cleaning out needs to take place to prepare the way for the Lord to enter the throne room of one's heart. Repentance needs to happen... "God I have sinned before you, and now I turn from my sin and turn toward you."

What does repentance look like? Is it just saying a few words? Repentance is change in allegiance that leads to a change in direction. It is a contrition of the heart in response to the grace of God that brings about a new way of living. John's hearers experienced this contrition. They asked, "*What then shall we do?*" (3:10). He offered a general principle and three specific practices. The general principle was bear good fruit by changing the way they treated other people (3:9). He specifically told the nameless crowd to share their tunics with those who did not have one. He told the tax collectors not to collect more taxes than they were supposed to collect. And he told the soldiers not to extort money from people by making threats.

When confronted with the gospel, the believer ought to be moved to desire instant and ongoing repentance in his or her life. This is a desire to bear good fruits that match the repentance of one's life. For example, when God confronts a man about sexual sin, that individual, in repentance, blocks that sin from taking further root in his life and works to uproot every aspect of it. The woman who is confronted about how she handles finances, identifies the misuse of money and actively works to prioritize and allocate her finances in a way that pleases and honors God.

Repentance in the life of the Christian is not a one-time event. To use the words of John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress*, it is a life of ever turning toward that celestial city.

Have you repented and turned from your sin and turned toward Jesus? Not everyone does, which leads us to a final truth.

#### **4. The gospel's confrontation can be rejected by those who hear it.**

Read Luke 3:18-20.

While it seems that many people were coming out to see this radical preacher who dressed funny, ate strange food, and yelled a lot, there was at least a few people who rejected him. Luke tells us that Herod and Herodias were some of those who rejected the gospel. This is interesting because while Herod rejected the message, he was both perplexed and intrigued by it (Mark 6:20). John had confronted Herod about his lifestyle. Not only did he have the audacity to call the crowds a brood of vipers, but he was also bold enough to call the king an adulterer. Herodias hated John for drawing attention to their sin. She talked Herod into arresting and then finally executing John. Herod, however, kept John alive in the prison for a long time. Luke says that he "*gladly heard him.*" For whatever reason, Herod would give John opportunities to speak in the king's court. Each time Herod would walk away perplexed yet

intrigued.

I believe the message resonated with Herod on some level. Surely, he knew that taking his brother's wife was not only a cultural taboo but a sin against the God of Israel. So, when John took God's Word and applied it to that area of Herod's life, he understood his sin, but he was never willing to take a step toward confession, repentance, and finding forgiveness in God. Doing so would require a complete overhaul of his life and relationships. Among many things, it would demand that he tell his wife their entire relationship had been founded in sin. How would she respond? Probably not very favorably. It would require him to admit his sin publicly and show humility before the people he ruled. These were things he could not bring himself to do no matter how much he thought of John (Mark 6:20).

Herod said "no" to the Lord's invitation.

**Conclusion:** A confrontation with God is a good thing. It is an opportunity to choose a new direction and follow Him. Have you experienced a confrontation with Jesus? If so, you know it brings an awareness of God's presence and your sin. In that moment, if you respond in faith, then you will have an overwhelming desire to repent and walk away from your sin. Sadly, not everyone responds in faith as in the case of the young rich ruler.

Read Luke 18:18-23

This young, religious man was unwilling to acknowledge his personal sin when confronted with the gospel. "*All these I have kept...*", he said. Paul says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3:23). His unwillingness to faith into Jesus and turn from his sin resulted in him turning away very sad from what he needed.

God's Word confronts us now. How will you respond?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ? What would keep you from embracing the truth and believing on Jesus today?