

Luke 3,7-14

Sermon: **They felt free to ask**

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INTRODUCTION

1. In our last sermon we studied **(Isaiah 40:1–6)**. Luke, in his text, wants to emphasize that Jesus and the apostles believed John the Baptist was precisely that “voice crying in the wilderness.” His role was to prepare the people for the coming of the King. And I also believe that this coming was conditional—Israel as a nation had to decide whether they wanted to uphold the terms they once agreed upon with Yahweh on Mount Zion. At the time of John the Baptist, the Messiah was literally among His people. Theoretically, nothing stood in the way of the nation fulfilling those conditions—accepting their King and Him establishing His reign in Jerusalem.

1.1. Theoretically, it was possible. But there was one crucial prerequisite: Israel had to repent as a whole. Their hearts had to be turned fully to Yahweh—with all their heart, soul, and being. They had to do what no previous generation had ever wanted to do: sincerely seek forgiveness from God for centuries of stubborn rebellion and sin. Their hearts were of stone, and that is precisely why they never loved Yahweh as He deserved.

1.2. Did they listen? Did they hear and accept the preaching of John the Baptist? Sadly, no. Not only did they refuse to accept their King—they also killed Him. And with that, they brought upon themselves the “great tribulation,” one that I believe continues to this very day, still shaping the history of God’s people.

WHAT FRUITS PLEASE GOD?

2. **(Luke 3:7)** “So he was saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, ‘You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”

2.1. “To flee from the wrath to come.” From our perspective today—Christians two thousand years later—it’s easy to assume John the Baptist was speaking of God’s judgment on the whole world. For centuries preachers across the streets of Europe and America have cried, *“The judgment of God is near!”* And that may indeed be in view. But studying the Old Testament—the promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and King David—I am convinced this is primarily about God’s wrath upon His own people, Israel.

2.2. The prophets themselves continually warned Israel of this wrath, and at the same time rejoiced in the day when it would come. We see this in **(Malachi 4:6)** (3:24 in some traditions): *“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children.”* Who are those “fathers”? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prophets rejoiced because one day Israel as a nation would finally have authentic faith—a soft heart, like their fathers. But that day would also be a day of judgment: a day when God would wipe from the earth every person who, though physically descended from Abraham, did not have that repentant and renewed heart. In other words, not every Jew automatically inherits God’s kingdom.

2.3. That is why John the Baptist says: “The King is here. Now is the time to decide what you will do with the message I bring!” He calls them “offspring of vipers”—because within them is poison, the poison of selfishness, rebellion, and disobedience to Yahweh. John knew them. He had watched them from his youth and understood what drove them. Their hearts were not directed toward fulfilling the covenant made on Mount Zion, but toward their own interests.

2.4. **(Luke 3:8)** *“Therefore produce fruits that are consistent with repentance, and do not start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children for Abraham.”*

2.5. John warns them: *“Produce fruits that are consistent with repentance.”* It is not enough to say with your lips, “Yahweh is our God.” It is not enough to know the Scriptures and intellectually agree with its truths. Real change is required—in motives, in values, in life. Their lives had to show that something had truly changed within them, that they had borne good fruit. Repentance was necessary!

2.6. John immediately unmasks their false reasoning: *“Do not say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’”* Why? Because he knew where the Jews placed their security. Their main thought was: *“I am a Jew, a descendant of Abraham, and that is enough. That is my ticket to blessing, my pass to eternal life.”* This way of thinking gave them an excuse never to admit their true condition—sinful, rebellious, and selfish.

2.7. That is why John warns them: *“Do not think you are God’s children just because you are Abraham’s descendants! You are not God’s children unless you bear the fruits of repentance. God is not bound to your status as His chosen people. He can raise up children for Abraham out of these very stones, and if necessary—wipe you from the face of the earth. He does not need you to fulfill His plan!”*

2.8. John's words are just as true for us who call ourselves Christians today. We too often hide behind belonging to a church, a denomination, or a tradition—as if that gives us a special standing before God. We say: *"Our church has the purest gospel. We have the most correct doctrines. We baptize more people. We build new churches."* But none of that proves that an individual has God's blessing. The real question is: where do I personally stand in my relationship with Him?

2.9. John's message is clear—for them, and for us: *"It's not about a group, a nation, a church, or a community. It's about you as an individual. It's about your heart, your life, your reality. God is not concerned with which herd you belong to, because the herd won't save you. What He wants is your heart—all of you. And when the day of judgment comes and the gates of the eternal kingdom are opened, the only valid ticket will be a repentant heart and the fruits of a life lived in line with that repentance—nothing else."*

GIVE THEM A CLOAK

3. (Luke 3:9) **"But indeed the axe is already being laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."**

3.1. The reality we live in constantly sets us before a choice: will we be a tree that bears fruit, or a tree that remains barren? Every day we choose—the path of righteousness, truth, mercy, forgiveness, and self-giving to others, or the path of selfishness, envy, lies, and injustice. Our fruits clearly reveal whose children we are—God's or the devil's.

3.2. "The axe is already being laid at the root of the tree." John is saying plainly: the decision must be made now. Every day you choose which way your life will go—but be aware, the axe is already ready. You don't know when it will strike at the root of your life—perhaps even today. The crucial thing is to decide before that moment comes: will your life follow the path of righteousness, or the path of evil?

3.3. This was John the Baptist's powerful and concrete message to his people on the banks of the Jordan. After that, the people began questioning him.

3.4. (Luke 3:10) **"And the crowds were questioning him, saying, 'Then what are we to do?'"**

3.4.1. "What should we do? If we don't want to be a tree cut down and thrown into the fire, then what do those fruits look like, John?"—the people asked.

3.5. (Luke 3:11) **"And he would answer and say to them, 'The one who has two tunics is to share with the one who has none; and the one who has food is to do likewise.'"**

3.6. John responds very simply, without long discussions about politics or social reforms. He lists two things: clothing and food—the basic needs of every human being. And he gives a concrete example: "the one who has two tunics, let him share with the one who has none." He didn't say: "If you have

five, give away two,” or “everyone must have exactly the same.” John’s point was this: if you live in abundance and your neighbor has nothing, why are you ignoring him? What is stopping you from helping? If God’s love lives in you, it will show itself in care for others.

3.6.1. When we compare this to our society, especially in the Western world, it’s hard not to feel the sting of these words. We are surrounded by abundance: shelves full of food, closets full of clothes, houses, cars, technology, vacations... And in such abundance it is easy to occasionally be “good”—to give a donation, to take part in a charity campaign, even to display our mercy in front of cameras. But behind the scenes we often stand with broken families, strained relationships with children, collapsed marriages, and years of silence with our own parents.

3.7. John is speaking about something much more personal and much deeper. “Fruits of repentance” do not mean occasional donations, but a consistent, tangible concern for those who are truly part of our lives—family, neighbors, brothers and sisters in the faith. He mentions food and clothing because, without them, survival was impossible: food gave life, and clothing not only protected from the daytime heat but also kept you warm at night—that’s how important a cloak was in those days. John is really saying to them: *“If you do not lack these things, but you close your eyes to the needs of those around you—then who are you, really?”*

3.8. Honestly, this is a message that cuts straight to the heart. I myself feel conviction in these words. It is so easy to neglect the needs of others because my selfishness naturally takes control. If we are honest with ourselves, there are very few moments when we truly think of others more than ourselves. But that is the essence: the desire to be people who bear good fruit. The desire to choose the path of selflessness, despite our selfishness—because that is what God’s righteousness requires of us.

3.9. And if we understand the biblical perspective, then we know: God never promoted absolute equality. To some He gives wealth, to others poverty. To one He gives great talents, to another fewer. Why? Because He, as the Author of reality, is writing a story in which every role has a purpose—to glorify Him in its own unique way. Our stories are interwoven, and in each of them He places the same question before us: will you walk the path of righteousness, or the path of evil?

THEY FELT FREE TO ASK

4. (Luke 3:12–14) *“Now even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they said to him, ‘Teacher, what are we to do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.’ And soldiers also were questioning him, saying, ‘And what are we to do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone, nor harass anyone, and be content with your wages.’”*

4.1. Here Luke singles out two groups—tax collectors and soldiers. I don’t think that’s by accident. If we follow the Gospels, we notice that the word “tax collector” keeps appearing again and again in the New Testament. In that society, the word “tax collector” was basically a synonym for the worst kind of sinner. It was assumed that such a man had no hope—that God could never reach him. He

had crossed all boundaries and forfeited every chance of being saved. In their eyes, he was a tree destined for the fire.

4.2. A tax collector was a Jew serving the Roman Empire. Rome demanded from him that he collect taxes from his own people and hand over Rome's share. The tax collector was on the front lines—at markets, harbors, trade centers—collecting the dues.

4.3. When the tax collectors and soldiers heard John's message, they were shaken. They knew what society thought of them, and they knew what their status was. In them arose a question: *"Is there any hope for us? Is there a chance that we, too, can be saved?"* And that question, I believe, was a good sign—their consciences were stirred. John answered them plainly: *"Collect no more than what you have been ordered."*

4.4. What did he mean by that? In those days, tax collectors had enormous power. Behind their title stood the might of the Roman Empire. If a tax collector claimed someone wasn't paying, soldiers immediately enforced it with violence. The tax collector knew he had that backing and that almost no one could resist him—and the temptation was overwhelming. Rome didn't care if they abused that power, as long as Rome got its share. The tax collectors knew this, and they exploited it for selfish gain.

4.5. Honestly, I know from my own experience how strong the temptation of power and institutional backing can be. When you're given a title and authority, it's easy to think: *"I'm the law. I can do whatever I want."* I've had moments in my own life where I misused a position and used it for selfish or dishonorable motives. That is exactly what John is exposing—both in the tax collectors and in the soldiers.

4.6. His message to them was simple, but sharp: *"Stop abusing your power. Stop thinking you're above the law because you hold a title and authority. Instead of oppressing others, use your power to help the weak."* In other words—tax collectors, stop impoverishing your own people; soldiers, you are called to protect, not to oppress.

4.7. And if we look at today's world, nothing has changed. We see institutions that should protect the people often colluding with crime. Instead of removing poison from the streets, they feed it—drugs, prostitution, loan-sharking—all fueled by the corrupt hunger for profit and power. Lives are destroyed, families torn apart, entire societies broken. History, tragically, keeps repeating itself. That's why John's message was just as relevant then as it is today: *"Repent, and stop producing fruits of selfishness and evil. Begin to bear fruits of righteousness."*

4.8. Finally, we can imagine how much the religious establishment disliked what John had to say to tax collectors and soldiers. They had long since written off anyone with the title of "tax collector." No tax collector would have even thought of asking a Pharisee, a scribe, or a priest such a question. They already knew the answer they would get: *"You're cursed. There's no salvation for you,"* the religious leaders would have said. But here's what's striking: even though John was fiery, direct, and even aggressive in his words, the tax collectors felt free to ask him, *"Is there something I can do to inherit*

the kingdom of God?" In other words, they recognized in John something they had never seen in the Pharisees—something called *grace*.