

“Do you like to hear the good or the bad news first?”
Luke 3:15 NIV

“The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.”

The Gospel writer Luke was a superior reporter.

He never told yarns that opened:

“Long ago in a faraway land . . .”

As you know, good reporters answer basic questions:

“Who, what, when, where, and why.”

Luke carefully covered who, when, where etc...

Note how specifically he began chapter 3:
“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country

around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”¹
Luke reinforced his report with verifiable facts.

We often lose sight of another vital where Luke excelled.

Speakers must treat an additional question about the “who, what, when, why, and where.”

Robert Webber was Professor of Theology at Wheaton College for years and wrote the 1980s best seller: *Worship Is a Verb*.

Webber made an observation about people in the pew that preachers should heed.

Ministers assume, said Webber, that everyone is interested in “what happened to the ancient Jebusites.”

In other words, when reporting who, when, where, etc., we must also ask: **“Who cares?”**

Most church folks are not really concerned about what happened to the ancient Israelites, either.

Few of them read the Old Testament.

¹ Luke 3:1-3 NIV

But suppose irrefutable evidence shows that the Israelites failed because they refused to hear the bad news before hearing the good news.

Would you want to know more about Israel and its history?

No one likes hearing bad news.

Think of the folks who die early because they refuse to accept that they are seriously ill.

One of our daughters sent us the story of an old, Italian man who lived alone in the country. Here was his bad news:

He wanted to dig his tomato garden, but it was strenuous work as the ground was hard. His only son, Vincent, who used to help him, was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his imprisoned son and described his predicament.

Dear Vincent,

I am feeling pretty badly because it looks like I won't be able to plant my tomato garden this year. I'm just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. I know if you

were here my troubles would be over. I know you would be happy to dig the plot for me. Love, Dad

A few days later he received a letter from his son. Dear Dad,

Don't dig up that garden. That's where I buried the bodies. Love, Vinnie

At 4 o'clock the next morning, FBI agents and local police swarmed over the place and dug up the entire area without finding any bodies. They apologized to the old man and left. That same day the old guy received another letter from his son.

Dear Dad,

Go ahead and plant the tomatoes now. That's the best I could do under the circumstances.

Love you, Vinnie

Oft times when we properly deal with bad news, good news happens.

The Old Testament shows beyond all doubt that Israel failed because it refused to hear bad news about its condition.

The OT also tells how Israel looked for the same life-answers modern Americans do.

Israel kept looking for a savior.

By savior I mean someone who would bring about change—help them live more comfortably—make them feel better about themselves.

The Jews called that person a Messiah, an anointed one.

Greeks called that person, “Christ.”

Americans call that person a President.

Other countries refer to that person as Prime Minister.

Human expectations of presidents, prime ministers, and messiahs are largely the same.

They hope that person will change conditions and help them live securely and better.

- Establish their concepts of justice.
- Do what they consider right.

Nearly all folks hope to the end that there is an individual out there who can fulfill their dreams and solve their problems.

Not everyone agrees about how those goals should be attained.

They disagree on who “fits the bill,” but virtually all hope in a specific individual.

Many Republicans think Mr. Trump is doing well.

Some Republicans want an alternate.

At the beginning of 2019, Democrats are sorting and selecting among dozens of hopefuls.

Many expectations and hopes will be attached to the one elected in 2020.

That process has been going on every four years in this country since 1789.

Yet, regardless of party, not one president has enjoyed unanimous support throughout his tenure.

Though his name is voiced a billion times every day, not even George Washington attained full approval for two terms.

2600 years ago a famous OT announcer of bad news advised Israel: quit placing your hopes in human beings.

“The way of human beings is not in their control . . . mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.”¹

Folks idolize humans beings as though they are gods and every time they get burned.

The bad news is clear: not one man or woman can perfectly advise you in all circumstances or ultimately arrange a positive outcome of your life.

Does that mean citizens should give up looking for and voting for good leaders?

We look for evidence of wisdom, godliness, and honesty before we vote.

We also pray for all those in office, whether we voted for them or not.

The Bible and secular history confirm the fact that all leaders are finite.

They do not know everything.

They cannot foresee the future.

How can they know where to walk and where to lead us?

On top of that, money and power tend to corrupt leaders of all kinds.

The excuses some political leaders make for their behavior remind me of a Christmas story that I found in an old Ideals Magazine.

This letter to Santa suggests nearly all the reasons why we should not depend on any human being

It begins:

“I am writing this letter for my brother because his arm is in a sling, and the doctor said he shouldn't move his fingers too much. He sprained his wrist yesterday when he fell off the refrigerator, and we've all been pretty busy since then. My mother says it's amazing how putting one arm in a sling can keep three people jumping.

“But my brother said he won't ask for anything else if I only write this letter to you to explain what he was doing on the refrigerator.

¹ Jeremiah 10:23

He's afraid you'll forget about how good he's been for most of this year.

"And, really, he has been pretty good. He's only had a few slip-ups. Like the time he painted Jerome.

He and Jerome found the paints in a box in the garage, and I guess they figured they were watercolors and they'd wash right off. My brother was as surprised as anybody when Jerome's mother called to say that she could not get the green stars off Jerome's forehead. I don't think you should blame my brother for this because it was really just an accident, and the stars wore off in a couple of days.

"My brother's really pretty good most of the time. . . My mother says his heart's in the right place, and he cares about other people. Once he gave a giant jar of olives to the school cafeteria. He won the olives at a carnival by guessing that there were 870 of them in the jar. He guessed it exactly.

My father told him it was an amazing thing to do, but my brother said that he

couldn't eat that many olives in a hundred years and could he give them to somebody that needed them. So my father brought them to the school and bought my brother and me ice cream sodas to celebrate.

"You see, he's really pretty good, so I know you'll understand when I tell you about the refrigerator.

"What started it was when my mother hid the Christmas cookies. She said she had to hide them because last year we only left some burned macaroons and she had to serve store-bought cookies on Christmas. So my brother and I decided to play detective. It was only a game.

Really. I mean we weren't going to eat the cookies. We were just going to find them.

"My brother was playing bloodhound and sniffing the air in the kitchen when, all of a sudden, he started barking and pointing at the cabinet over the refrigerator. He stood on the highchair and climbed up on the top of the refrigerator. When he opened the cabinet, the

yelping got louder, and the next thing I knew he was on the floor, covered with chocolate chips and pecan sandies.

“He wasn't worried about his hand so much as he was about getting the cookies back into the saltines boxes that my mother had hidden them in. So we picked them up real fast and didn't even eat one. We put them back in the boxes and cleaned up the crumbs, and that's when my mother came in and my brother's hand started to hurt.

“So, you see, it was just a detective game that he was playing, and he wasn't trying to swipe the cookies. And it was pretty smart to guess that they were in the saltines boxes because he knew my mother knew that he doesn't like saltines any more than he likes olives.

“So now that you know what happened, I know you'll decide to give my brother the things that he asked for and not hold it against him that he fell off the refrigerator in the middle of a game.

“I hope that you do, Santa, 'cause he's really a pretty good brother most of the time. But, if I were you, I'd hold off on giving him the blowtorch for a while.”¹

- **We have a hard time knowing what's right.**
We find it difficult to do it even when we know the right.
- **We're confused and feel guilty.**
 - **We live in a world that could blowtorch itself at any time.**

Israel kept hoping that their messiah, their great leader would arrive and make them comfortable—bring them good news.

That's what the angels told the shepherds, isn't it?

**"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
(11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."**²

¹ By Kathleen Monahan & Kathie Rizzo, Published in Christmas Ideals, 1988

² Luke 2:10, 11 NIV

But we must confront bad news before we can enjoy Jesus' Good News.

We feel safe and justified because we listen to newscasters and friends who confirm our opinions.

We take a lot of comfort from being around folks who agree with us.

Consider this point:

At the height of his ministry, some people went to Jesus to inform him of the latest bad news.

It's as if reporters from all the major news sources arrived asking Jesus' opinion of a bloody, horrible incident.

“What do you think Jesus?”

Was it the government’s fault that these people died?

“Were the people who died extra guilty?”

Do you recall Jesus’ answer to all the opinions—to those passing judgment on others and the situation?

Jesus addressed one topic.

He did not try to agree with any speculation.

Very soberly he said, **“Unless you change your act, you will all die the same way.”¹**

The first word John preached was, “Repent.”²

The first word Jesus preached was, **“Repent.”³**

When the Apostles began preaching the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection, but pointed to the bad news brought about by people’s hate, folks asked, **“What shall we do?”**

The first word the Apostles’ said was “Repent.”⁴

God’s Word consistently informs us that we must change into Christ’s likeness.

The word “repent” means that we must change our habits and life-direction toward becoming Christ-like before we can expect God’s full blessings.

- **want to be baptized! God! That is why you “First go and show by the way you live that you have repented.”¹**

¹ Luke 13:5 Bob’s translation

² Matthew 3:1

³ Matthew 4:17

⁴ Acts 2:37, 38

Paul told the Roman church: “Therefore, I urge you . . . in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”²

Does your life reflect repentance--change?

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.³

“Try to stay out of quarrels and seek to live a clean and holy life, for one who is not holy will not see God.⁴

Unless we give up hopes in all human saviors;

- Stop conforming to the world’s standards;
- change our behavior into Christ’s image;
- **center our hopes in Jesus, the Son of God;**
- our bad new will only get worse.

¹ Luke 3:8

² Romans 12:1 NIV

³ 2 Peter 3:9 NIV

⁴ Hebrews 12:14- Living Bible

The following Scriptures confirm this:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”⁵

“Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.”⁶

By following Jesus’ example, we see daily demonstrations of God’s power, wisdom, and love.

May God bless us as we work together toward having Christ fully in all of us.

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⁵ Romans 12:2 NIV

⁶ Colossians 1:27, 28 NIV