

We have been going through—well, been going through—we started going through Luke last week, and this morning we’re going to continue going through the Gospel of Luke. So, we’re going to be in Luke chapter 1; we’re going to be looking at verses 5 through 25. So, if you want to go and turn there, it’s Luke chapter 1 verses 5 through 25, or if you do have the YouVersion app, it will already be there if you’re already at the Sunday morning worship event.

Now, last week we had seen that Luke made a case regarding the reliability of the testimony that he’s writing about: that he did a lot of research and in what he wrote is trustworthy and accurate. So, now we’re going to begin by looking at the narrative that he said that he is writing. And this is not just a story; this is a revelation of who Jesus is as told through the Gospel of Luke. So, let’s begin with a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, as we look at your word and see what you have shown us through these men—through Luke specifically—what you’ve shown us about yourself and what you’ve shown us about your Son and about your Holy Spirit. God, open up our eyes, open up our ears, open up our hearts to what you have given these—given Luke to write. Holy Spirit, work in us to transform us, to break us where we are stubborn, and to lift us up where we’re weak, and to draw us to Christ. And may the Lord—may you be honored as we read your word. And I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Beginning in verse 5, Luke writes:

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to

speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Now, in these, in these verses, Luke is recounting the story of how an angel gave Zechariah the news about the man that we know was John the Baptist, and in this we’re going to see three things in the way this story unfolds. First, in verses 5 through 7, we’re going to see that Zechariah and Elizabeth faithfully obey God yet they still suffered.

Now, what do we have going on here? Well, first a little bit of a structural thing which helps us understand the passage itself. The idea of Elizabeth being barren bookends this passage. In verse 7 it says, “But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren.” So at the beginning of this narrative, we have the fact that Elizabeth is barren, and in the end of it—verse 25—it says that “the Lord has looked on me” (this is Elizabeth talking) “has looked on me, to take away my reproach.” That reproach is a reference to her barrenness. So, we have the barrenness of Elizabeth bookending this narrative, and that helps us understand kind of what going on here, and kind of helps us focus on how this relates to the overall story of Jesus.

Now, one thing about this narrative is this: there are a lot of Old Testament references or Old Testament connections that we will not get into in detail because we will be here till three o’clock in the afternoon, and I don’t want to keep y’all here because you’ll be asleep halfway through that. Nah, just kidding. But we’re not going to get into the details of every single Old Testament connection, but we will be looking at some of the bigger connections, and those connections are related to the barrenness of Elizabeth. So, this helps us understand the passage.

Now, it begins by talking about Zechariah and Elizabeth being faithful and obedient. Now, there are some words here that can be misunderstood when taken out of context and not seen for what they’re actually—for what’s actually going on. It says in verse 6, “they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly.” This does not mean they were sinless. They weren’t. This does not mean that they’ve never done anything wrong or that they’ve never disobeyed. What this means, we might put it this way: Zechariah—if they were Christians living today—Zechariah and Elizabeth, you know, they love God and they’re serving him; they’re doing everything they can to honor God in what they do. That’s the gist of what’s going on here. The idea here is that John, who is their son, John comes from parents who (as we would say today) would raise him in a Christian home who loves God. So, that’s where John’s coming from.

But also that’s connected to Mary, which we’ll see, I believe, next week. So, there’s some connections here. But the idea is that these two people love God and were doing the best they could to follow him. They were keeping the Law to the best of their ability. However, despite that, they still had a burden upon them. That burden: Elizabeth’s barrenness.

Now, nowadays for a wife to not have children is not a big deal. However, in the days of Elizabeth and Zechariah, it was a huge deal. In the Old Testament it was a huge deal not to have children. And it was seen as not just a burden, but the words that are often used are either “disgrace” or “reproach.” This was a disgrace to her and to Zechariah. and they couldn’t fix it. Nothing they could do could fix this problem. So, this was the burden that they suffered despite their faithfulness.

Oh, how often we can be faithful to God and yet still have a burden upon us that we can’t fix. And the truth is there are many people in this world who do have a burden on them—may not even realize it—but it’s a burden they cannot fix, and it’s a burden actually each one of us struggles with. And we’ll get to that in a little bit as far as what that is. But it says that they were faithful and yet had this burden.

Now, this barrenness has, like I said, Old Testament—there’s a lot of Old Testament connections here—but her barrenness follows in the line of other women from the Old Testament who were also barren women. Now, we know the names of four of them; one we don’t know the name of because, well, we’re not given her name, but we know her husband’s name. We have in Genesis 11 through 16, Sarai, later known as Sarah: barren. Rebecca in Genesis 25: barren. Rachel in Genesis 29: barren. Manoah’s wife (whose name we don’t know, we just know her husband’s name is Manoah) in Judges 13: barren. Hannah in 1 Samuel 1: barren. All five of these women also carried this burden of barrenness, and there’re connections from Elizabeth to these women. She’s in this line of barren women.

But it goes just beyond that—it goes beyond that to what that barrenness ultimately leads to, and we’ll get to that in a little bit (yes, I’m doing a lot of “get to it” because this is being—Luke unfolds this as we’re going along). But he’s connecting her bareness to these Old Testament women who are also barren. And what’s going on?

Well, we know from the angel’s response that “your prayer has been answered” that Zechariah and Elizabeth were praying for resolution. They were praying for a child. They were essentially praying for salvation from this burden that they were bearing that they could not fix. And for years upon years upon years they waited and waited and waited. Sometimes God doesn’t answer our prayers as quickly as we’d like him to. But it’s not our calendar that God’s held to; it’s his own. What must we do? Wait on the Lord. Wait on the Lord and his timing because our timing is based upon our selfish desires, but God’s timing is always—always—perfect. And the timing for this account was absolutely perfect.

Now, they’ve been praying. They’ve been praying for help. But here’s another thing: there are Old Testament connections here, but just like in the Old Testament that has types and shadows that look forward to Christ, this is also a type and shadow looking forward to Christ. The barrenness and the burden of Elizabeth was a lack of a child. But this is a type and shadow of the barrenness and the burden ultimately of the people of God that is sin: spiritual barrenness. Elizabeth and Zechariah were praying for a child, and the people of God were praying for salvation. This is a type and shadow following in line with the Old Testament of types and shadows of Christ. And we’ll see that fulfilled ultimately in the end.

So what’s going on in these first few verses? Verses 5 through 7, Elizabeth and Zechariah: faithful, following God, and yet still had this burden. They’ve been praying, and so finally in his time, God answered.

Verses 8 through 23. In verses 8 through 23, God promised to send the forerunner of Messiah. God promised to send Messiah's forerunner which, by the way, was prophesied in Malachi chapter 3 verse 1. It talks about a forerunner runner will come before Messiah, and this forerunner will prepare the way of Messiah. That forerunner is pronounced right here.

It says that they were—that Zechariah in verse 8—he was serving as a priest before God. Now, this introduces a little bit of a background into Zechariah. Now, the original readers would have understood some things that we don't necessarily understand today, and so let's need—to kind of explain a little bit of context.

Zechariah was a man who was a priest. He was one of many priests. There's estimated at the time there were about 18,000 priests serving at the time. That's a lot! So, Zechariah, one of 18,000 priests (there were more priests there than I think maybe even in this town; wow, that's a lot of priests) but he was serving. And the time had come, it says, that it was his turn to enter the temple (verse 9), "to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense."

Now, where he went was inside what we might today call the temple proper—the main building basically—and this altar of incense was actually in a place known as the "holy place." but that's not the holy of holies. This holy place was actually literally right outside the holy of holies. So, he had the—you know—if this podium, this stand was the altar of incense that table would have been (extended that way) will be the curtain into the holy of holies. Right there. And what happened is the priest would go in there and they would burn incense to the Lord and that incense represented the petitions going up to God, the intercessory prayers being sent up to God by the priests on behalf of the people. And doing this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. With 18,000 priests, not likely he's going to get to do it. But here he did. And how did he get to do it? Well, we might say luck of the draw. Why do we say that? Verse 9: he was "chosen by lot." Luck of the draw. However, this was not mere luck.

It wasn't just chance that Zechariah happened to be the one chosen for this. In fact, the events that happened here didn't have to happen in the temple. The angel, who know as Gabriel, could have shown up in Zechariah's house, could have delivered the message there. No. He did it here, and what is being going—what's going on here is this: God sovereignly placed Zechariah in this location at this specific time so that he could deliver this specific message to him in this specific place.

Think about this. Zechariah is there. The incense is burning. Intercessory prayers going up to God, and God answers the prayer right there. This is God's sovereignty at work here. This is not mere chance. This is not mere luck. This is God setting things to work in his plan. And when God works his plan, we can trust his plan is gonna always be perfect. But God's working here. He takes this priest, puts him in this place, and then the angel shows up. And what's the angel say? He says first, "Fear not." When an angel showed up in Scripture, often times the person to whom the angel's visiting responded in fear, and God would tell them "fear not." Well, the angel would say "fear not," and the angel then would deliver the message given to the angel by God.

So, the angel here, Gabriel, is delivering the word of God to Zechariah, and tells Zechariah, "Your prayers will be answered. You will have a son. You will have a son." And he outlines the information regarding John by looking at various things. In verse 13, Gabriel gives John—gives Zechariah—the name of the

child: John. In verse 14, Gabriel explains the response that will come about because of John's birth: joy, gladness, rejoicing. In verse 15, Gabriel describes the character of John. Now, here we have more Old Testament connections.

So, when we have in verse 15, he describes the character of John, he says it this way: "for he will be great before the Lord" (that is, he will have a prominent role—he's important in the in the story and the unfolding of God's plan), "he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb" (and we'll see that come back into a play with Mary). So, this language that's used here is a callback to three different individuals in the Old Testament: it's a callback to Samson in Judges 13 verse 7, it's a callback to Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:11, and it's a callback (in this case specifically by name) in verse 17 to Elijah recorded in 2 Kings 1:8. The character of John, by referencing these Old Testament men, what Gabriel is telling Zechariah—what God is revealing to Zechariah—is this: "Your son will be the culmination of all of those Old Testament prophets and leaders." All those who went out calling people to God, it's telling a Messiah is coming. John will be the culmination of all of them. He is the direct forerunner of Messiah, fulfilling Malachi 3:1.

And so, we also see that later when Jesus himself said there was no greater prophet than John. Why? Because John was the culmination—the ultimate fulfillment—of all of these prophets and leaders in John. So again, more Old Testament references here.

But in verse 16, he then moves to the mission of John. What's he saying in verse 16? "he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God." And the phrase that's key phrase here, "he will turn many," is actually repeated in verse 17 when he says, "to turn the hearts of the fathers." The mission of John was to preach repentance of sin, to turn people, to turn hearts (means to call them to repent of their sin), to point out their sinfulness, their rebellion against God, and to tell them, "Repent, for Messiah is coming!" That was John's message: "Repent, for Messiah is coming!"

So, by the way, when we look at the Old Testament prophets—today there are "prophets" that if you listen to them they'll go on with meaningless words (as some people have said, "spiritual word salad") that means nothing but sure is uplifting. And they, 99 percent of the time, promise good things, and it's all going to be better and hopeful, and you're going to have everything in this world, blah, blah, blah. No. And they say that's in line with the prophets. If you look at the Old Testament and the prophets that they—and the message that the prophets had—the message was this (they all had the same message): "You've sinned! Repent or be judged. If you repent, you'll be blessed, but repent." Their message was repentance, and that is John's message in line with God's prophets. But unlike the prophets of old, who said, "Messiah is coming sometime," John could say "Messiah is about to show up," and by the way, he did in John's lifetime. But his message was repentance.

Now, if you remember when I talked about the barren women, that helps define this text. The barren women that Elizabeth was in the line of, well, those women also were promised sons by God who will be prominent people in the kingdom of God. So, we'll go through them: Sarah, Isaac; Rebecca, Jacob; Rachel, Joseph; Manoah's wife, Samson; and Hannah, Samuel. Elizabeth, John. A heritage of barren women being promised children who will have prominent roles in the kingdom of God. And John's is more prominent than all of those who come before him, and he, like them, will tell them "Repent."

But then in verse 17, Gabriel moves to the authority or the power behind his work. What does he say? In verse 17, he says this: “and he will go before him,” that is, he will go before Messiah, “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” In other words, that which empowered Elijah to be such a great prophet will also be the same power behind John; the same authority, and that authority is God himself, the Holy Spirit. God himself is the authority for John.

However, Zechariah—faithful man, obeying God, a priest—looks at angel, at Gabriel, and says, “Yeah right! I don’t believe it! It doesn’t make sense to me. That can’t happen. We’re too old.” What did Zechariah ultimately do? He looked at the angel and said, “I reject the word of God because it doesn’t conform to my views; I reject the word of God because it doesn’t conform to my ideas; and what I think makes sense is what is going to happen, Gabriel, not what God said.” And what was Gabriel’s answer? “You’re mute.” Judgment for disbelief, and he says as much. He tells him, “because of your disbelief.” “I am Gabriel,” in verse 19, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring to you this good news. And behold you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place.” Why? “Because you did not believe my words,” which are God’s words because God gave him this message. Zechariah rejected the word of God and replaced it with his own ideas. And what’s God’s answer? Judgment.

Any time we take this [*holds up Bible*] and we replace it with our own opinions, our own preferences, our own whatever, God’s answer is “there’re consequences.” There’re consequences. The Word of God should be accepted and submitted to, and Zechariah didn’t do it. Oh, by the way, that contrasts with Mary later, and when we talk about Mary and the revelation of Christ next week, we’ll see that comparison or, like technically, that contrast between the two. But he rejected and he was punished for it. Now this was not merely punishment. It was actually an opportunity to discipline him, and give Zechariah an opportunity to meditate on God’s word and learn to trust God’s word and not his own words. That’s why he was silenced: to say, “Your words you trust in? They’re gone. Trust the Word of God.” Ultimately in the end, we’ll see eventually later, Zechariah did. He did.

So, we have the declaration that the forerunner of Christ has come and that Zechariah will be his father, Elizabeth his mother. But Elizabeth then responded, and in Elizabeth’s response we see that God kept his promise, removing the disgrace, in verses 24 and 25.

God kept his promise and removed the disgrace. What does it say: “After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived,” John was conceived, “and for five months she kept herself hidden.” And what did she say? She said this in verse 25: “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me.” What did he do: “to take away my reproach among people.” God gave them salvation, freeing them from the burden that they’d borne (for, that they bore, they beard) the burden they had for many, many years. And just as the barrenness was a type and shadow of the burden of sin upon the people, this is a type and shadow of the salvation that comes through Christ Jesus. Just as God removed the reproach of barrenness from Elizabeth, God will remove the reproach of sin from his people. This is a type and shadow of Christ. She’s praising God for what he’s done.

And so, what do we see in this story ultimately? But first, we see that God has a plan to save his people. God has a plan and that plan is Christ, and John is the forerunner of Christ proclaiming, “Repent, for Messiah is coming.”

If you're here this morning or if you're watching online and you've never put your faith in Jesus, now is the time to do it. God sent his son because each one of us are sinners. Each one of us have earned the wrath of God because of our sin. And Jesus shed his blood willingly, voluntarily, and in doing so, Jesus was the recipient of God's wrath. God poured out his wrath on his own son in substitution of sinners who have earned that wrath. Jesus never sinned. He was perfect, and yet he received that wrath. And on the third day, he bodily rose again, giving new life. And so all who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus as the risen Lord are saved because of the grace and mercy of Jesus. But we must repent and believe.

Going to church won't save you. Your parent's faith won't save you. I don't care if your parents were the greatest Christians in the world, that won't save you. You must repent and believe.

But if you're here today and you are a Christian—you have repented and you do believe—this passage, this narrative is not just for the unbelievers about Christ, it's also for us, too. The message of John is also our message, but with a slight little twist. Here's the twist: John's message was this, "Repent, for Messiah is coming"; our message is this: "Repent, for Messiah is returning." Are we preaching that message?

Throughout Scripture—Old Testament, New Testament—everything can be summed up in the law with two: love God, love others. If we love God, we're gonna desire to know him, we're gonna desire to serve him, we're gonna desire to share him. And if we love people, we're going to want to show them God's love, and we're going to want to share this good news. If we truly love someone, we must love them enough to tell them the truth of the gospel of Jesus. If we say, "I love God," but we can't make time to show and share the gospel, I have to ask this question: do you love God? Do you? Because that which we love, we make time for, and if we don't make time for it, I have to ask, do you really love it?

That's a hard question each one of us must deal with, but it's a hard question few actually want to deal with. But as Christians, we have the same message that we are commanded to proclaim, "Repent, for Messiah is returning," and this time, when he returns, there will be no second chances. After the Second Coming, it's all over, it's done, it's judgment day.

We have a message; we must be proclaiming it. But are we? Are we?