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Luke 1:1-25

Weekly Bible Study Schedule

Tuesday, March 10, 7:00 AM in HHR #5

(breakfast provided)

Tuesday, March 10, 8:30 PM in Office #225

(Sen. Wayne Wallingford's office)

INTRODUCTION

We are beginning our series on the Gospel of Luke.

Luke has an interesting way of revealing truths and happenings to us. Some teach us, some correct us, and some remind us of God's faithfulness—He is with you.

That's what happened to one couple; their **unexpected event** reminded them of God's faithfulness—they were going to have a baby.

BACKGROUND OF LUKE

Luke was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul and friend. Luke was a physician. He wrote the largest book of the New Testament—the Gospel of Luke and his sequel the book of Acts. His writing was penned 30 years after the death of Christ.

Luke was a Gentile, the only Gentile to write a New Testament book. He was writing predominantly to Greeks-Gentiles, but also a narrative showing how the Israelites' rejection of Jesus made way for the Gentiles to come to faith in Jesus. It was always God's plan for Jews and Gentiles to place their faith in Jesus and follow the Messiah.

SOURCES

Luke was writing as an eyewitness, not just his personal witness, and also, the personal witness of other disciples to include Mark and Matthew. He relied on Mark's account, and what Mark didn't include gave way to Matthew's account as a primary source.

THEME OF BOOK

The God-Man: Jesus is Savior, and He is also man, fully God and fully man.

THEOPHILOUS

He's writing to a person named Theophilous, most likely a person of nobility, of high social status.

Luke 1:1-4: Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, (2) just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, (3) it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (4) that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

- **What Jesus did, v.1**
- **What Jesus taught, v.2**
- **Eyewitness, v.3**
- **Why did Luke write gospel, v.4**
- ***Asphaleia*, Greek word for certainty**

Luke's story is a careful account of a precise physician. In essence, the narrative is more like a movie than a photograph.

TIMELINE

Luke begins his account a few months before the birth of Christ.

- **400 years of silence. Heaven is silent 400 years**
- **500 years since an angelic visit in the book of Daniel**
- **800 years from the miraculous ministry of Elijah and Elisha**
- **God hasn't spoken one word, no angel, no prophet, nothing**
- **Absolute silence, until NOW!**

BEGINNING

The story of the Messiah, God's Son: Jesus comes to earth to dwell among men and restore humankind to a right relationship with God, the Father. And it starts with an older couple. **Unexpected Event #1**

1:5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea. Ruling at the time of Christ was Herod, an evil king. Historical literature informs one that Herod was so wicked he killed his wife and some of his sons. He was the murderer that massacred the infants in Bethlehem hoping to kill the Messiah (cf. Matthew 2). Aware no one would mourn at the time of his death, he gave orders, that when he died, the nobility was to be killed. So, although no one would mourn his death, there would be mourning in Jerusalem.

...there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah. Zechariah's name meant: **"God remembers."** All of the priests in Judea were descendants of Moses' brother Aaron. The priests would serve at the temple 2x a year for one week at a time. They would kill the sacrificial animals brought by the people. Priests taught the people the Word of God. 20,000 different priests were living in Judea, divided into 24 different groups (cf. 1 Chronicles 24). Divided, because there were so many priests they couldn't all serve at the same time. Thus, each division served two weeks per year at the Temple.

And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Elizabeth's name meant: **"my God is faithful."** She knew what the priesthood was all about. Elizabeth was in the family business.

- **In their pain and shame they remembered, God is faithful**
- **God was faithful to honor their prayers**
- **400 years of silence until now**

1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. It was important to Luke to make known they were righteous. God knew their motives, thoughts, and actions—Luke wanted to preserve the integrity of their faith and the way in which God relates to His people.

1:7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. In the day, it was a shame to be childless—a Jewish woman, from the priesthood and married to a priest, is barren. Childless in a Hebrew home was believed to be a mark of God's judgment, of God's displeasure. The Jewish Rabbis believed that there were seven ways to be cut off from

God. One way was to be a Jew whose wife was barren. For decades they lived targeted for false assumptions and accusations—something must be wrong with them. They were misunderstood by family, friends, and community. Luke wanted us to know this wasn't about sin in their life. This was not about punishment. It was about God's planning.

*"But when the **fullness of time had come**, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)*

The believer's tendency is to ask God to "hurry up" and to put Him on our timetable, particularly when in pain or have unanswered prayer. However, faith is to surrender to God's timing, especially when we don't understand why He hasn't delivered us.

Think about the Israelites. Thousands of years they hopefully anticipated the coming of the Messiah—Savior, one that would deliver them. Yet, Jesus wasn't born until the "fullness of time". Not until nations, empires, leaders, infrastructure, transportation, communication, and commerce were suitably established. Notwithstanding the prophecies of old that needed fulfillment.

God knows when it's best to act on our behalf. God remembers our prayers. Let's remember His faithfulness.

1:8 Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty... 20,000 priests divided into 24 different groups to serve 2x a year for one week at a time. Each group drew lots—drawing random names to determine God's will as to who would sacrifice in the holy place in the Temple. Only a priest could have this honor. If you were chosen, you could only do it once in a lifetime. Zechariah's name was drawn.

Unexpected Event #2

Zechariah was selected to offer incense on the golden altar in the holy place of the Temple. It was an honor for Zechariah, every priest's dream. It doesn't get any better than that, or does it?

TEMPLE

- **The Court of Gentiles—where Gentiles were permitted**
- **The Court of Women—where Jewish women would convene**

- **The Court of Israelites—a place to worship where laymen could enter**
- **The Court of Priests—only priests could enter**
- **The Altar of Sacrifice—place for burnt offerings to the Lord. The coals were taken off the altar and placed into a golden bowl and then taken into the holy place.**
- **The Holy Place—present was the Golden Lampstand, Table of Showbread, and Altar of Incense. The incense would burn upon the altar and smoke would rise up symbolizing the prayers of the people.**
- **The Holy of Holies—Arc of the Covenant, the Seat of Mercy was present. The high priest entered one-time a year to make sacrifices for the sins of the people.**

1:9 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. What we understand is worshippers were outside. Zechariah gathered the coals and placed them into the golden bowl. Then he took the coals into a room he had never seen or been in before. The coals were spread on the altar. He laid the incense on the coals, and a cloud of smoke would rise as an offering to the Lord. Then the priests would leave.

1:11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense...

Now there had been 800 years since they had seen an angel and 400 years since the Lord had spoken to them. Luke gave us the location, because this was not a vision. The angel was literally standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

1:12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. Many places in Scripture when people saw an angel they were afraid. Throughout Scripture the angel calms the fear of the viewer.

1:13 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. Luke isn’t trying to tell us what Zechariah was praying at the altar. Zechariah’s dream was dead. His ability to have children was over. Any prayer dealing with having a son was long ago, and perhaps long forgotten.

In other words, Gabriel could have been saying, “the prayer you prayed a long time ago has been heard and is being answered.”

Maybe you prayed a prayer a long time ago: you had faith, you believed, you were committed, but it didn’t happen. Perhaps your dream, your desire, your need, wasn’t answered. Maybe you’ve lost hope.

1:13 and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. The name of John means: “**God is gracious.**” The angelic message to Zechariah is, “you and your wife have been faithful—I’m about to pour out my grace upon the earth.”

1:14 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.”

The angel is basically quoting Malachi chapter 4, which is a prophecy of the coming of the Lord. The angel is saying the Messiah is coming to the earth soon, and John is going to be the forerunner.

Unexpected Event #3

It’s important to Luke to present the Holy Spirit...and he does again and again in his gospel. This baby will be filled with the Spirit in the womb. That is miraculous. In the OT the Holy Spirit would come on and off some people, but never has the Spirit filled a person, or in other words, taken residence in a person.

1:18 And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” Why did he say what he did? He implies skepticism. Years have passed. It seems the angel is somewhat late. It’s been 800 years since the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. Miracles aren’t happening anymore, or are they?

I wonder how many people have left their faith in the past because God didn’t answer a prayer they offered. God seemed absent during their time of pain and suffering. Confused about how can a loving God allow bad things to happen to good people.

1:19 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.

God was getting ready to send the Gospel to the earth. That is His Son, Jesus:

- **One that created the universe**
- **To dwell upon the earth**
- **To reveal God, the Father**
- **To die for our sins**
- **To resurrect from the dead**
- **To ascend to heaven**
- **To return to earth**
- **To take His people to heaven**
- **To create a new heaven and earth**
- **So all who believe in His name for salvation from their sins, will live eternally with Him**

1:20 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." The normal reaction of someone who has had their life-long prayer answered is to tell people. If you've been childless and now are pregnant you want to shout it out. Zechariah lost that opportunity. Not only was he mute, he was deaf.

1:62 "And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called."
His inability to speak or hear served as a sign of his unbelief.

All this happened while Zechariah was in the Temple. The people began to wonder what had happened.

1:21 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...traditionally the priest would exit the temple and give the benediction to the worshippers. When one sees an angel, it's not business as usual.

Numbers 6:24: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

1:22 and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. This must have been the ultimate game of charades.

1:23: 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...

After 800 years, miracles have commenced once again. Interestingly, unlike her husband who couldn't speak, she chose not to speak to anyone about her pregnancy for the first 5 months. At that time, her miracle would be apparent to all.

1:25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

CONCLUSION

God is not silent. His voice is calling you to Himself, to His grace, and to His redemption through Jesus, the Christ. God remembers your prayers. He is faithful. He is gracious. Your reading this Bible study itself is an act of God's grace drawing you to Him. I pray your response will be that of Elizabeth.

SELECTED RESOURCES

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Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997)

Harris, Ralph W, ed., Stanley M. Horton, ed., and Gayle Garrity Seaver, ed., *The New Testament Study Bible: Luke Volume 4* (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1988)

Liefeld Walter L. "The Expositor's Bible Commentary" with *The New International Version, Volume 8*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984)

Marshall, I. Howard. *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1970)

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