

Luke 1:5-25 First Christmas Foreshadowed Falls Ch. PM 12/3/2023

There were two babies born in the Christmas story. Jesus we know. Who is the other baby? His name was John. He was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. John the Baptist told people that they needed to get ready for the coming of Christ. John brought people back to God. Who does that sound like? Yes, it sounds like the other baby in the Christmas story. That brings us to our main point...

**The birth of John the Baptist foreshadowed the birth of Christ, in order to bring sinners back to God.**

### **1. Eagerly desiring the arrival of a child. (v.5-17)**

In verse 5, the first thing that our author Luke does is he tells us about an older couple, a husband and wife.

The husband was a priest. In verse 6, Luke next informed us that the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were both righteous before God. In the original, the word blameless is an adjective.

Wait. Stop. Really?

There is something remote about this. Something almost legendary. Luke has informed us that this is some of the most important points for us to know about Jesus, and then the start of it has the tone of a rich fairy tale. Verse 5 almost reads like, ‘once upon a time there were two old people, a man and his wife, and they were the nicest people you could ever want to know.’

This is fitting, because Luke is about to reveal something that will stretch the knowledge and belief of the readers. By the end of these first two chapters, Luke will be expecting his readers to actually believe that a birth took place from a virgin mother.

So, let’s accept Luke’s approach as genius. It is genius for the Christmas story to begin this way. If Luke can get us to remember that God is able to cause a barren womb to conceive, then Luke could get you to consider believing that God is able to cause a virgin womb to conceive.

This elderly Jewish couple represented the true believing Israel within Israel, those who like Mary, Simeon, Anna, and others, feared God and were praying for the redemption of God’s people through the coming Messiah. They belonged to the generation that would see God’s salvation in person – the person of Jesus.

In verse 7, our author Luke, who was a medical doctor, informs us of the family status, the medical status and the medical condition of Elizabeth – the couple had no child, and she was barren.

Why did Luke tell us that the couple was righteous before God, before he told us that they had no child? It was important that it be established that the barrenness of Elizabeth and therefore the childlessness of the couple Zechariah and Elizabeth was not the result of any sin found in the couple. This couple’s childlessness was neither the result of sin, nor the occasion of sin. Zechariah and Elizabeth were walking blamelessly.

There are people who are righteous and yet suffering from illness, singleness, loneliness, unemployment, emotional wounds, loss, family stress, financial stress, mental illness in oneself or mental illness in a loved one, pressure from your employer, physical limitations, aging, and so on. Godly people can suffer.

In addition, suffering can make a person respond sinfully: for example, becoming sour, grumpy, cold, distant, complaining, unstable, irrational, or any number of bad and unacceptable reactions that are understandable, but sinful.

In just 3 verses, Luke has made it clear that this was not the case with Zechariah and Elizabeth. We are not even told until verse 13 that this couple had been praying for a baby. But were they praying for a baby for themselves? It almost seems as if they were praying for a Savior for the nation, and the good news the angel is bringing is that this couple will bear a son who will announce the Savior's arrival! THAT was certainly their prayer! In their waiting and their suffering, they remained godly, which means that they were sweet and joyful, they were loving and kind, they had good attitudes toward God, themselves, and other families who did have the blessing of children. They loved God, they loved each other, they loved God's people, they loved the families around them, and they loved other people's children.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were regular sinners like you and me. They received their righteousness by faith through the death and resurrection of Jesus, which was applied to them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because they were united to Jesus in justification, they were also united to Jesus in sanctification. That means, they received the status of being right before God as a gift, and the gift extended more and more into their character and behavior.

That is what is so fascinating about the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were already sinners inhabited with the justifying and sanctifying grace of God. They were already pointing to Jesus. And now God chose this family to point to Jesus in a very special and unique way. The godly womb that was barren would bear fruit. The family that had pointed to Jesus, would now have a son who would be the Heaven-picked pointer to Jesus. Zechariah and Elizabeth had a son named John the Baptist, whose role it was to point to Jesus. Since Zechariah and Elizabeth pointed to Jesus through their godly character when they had no children, what do you think they did when they became parents? They pointed their son John the Baptist to Jesus. So much was it ingrained into John the Baptist that when he had that peculiar temptation that comes to those serving the Lord – to let people worship you – John famously said, “I must decrease, but He must increase.” John had learned well from his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth, that we must always point people to Jesus.

Aging. Verse 7, the phrase, “*both were advanced in years*.” The verb is probaino. It means to throw forward. So, the literal phrase brought straight into English would read, ‘and they were both thrown forward in their days.’

Verse 8, Zechariah had duty as a priest. Verse 9, Zechariah entered the temple. Verse 10, the people were praying. Verse 11, An angel appeared to Zechariah. The reason for the angel's visit is to bring good news. But in verse 12, Zechariah was afraid. Verse 13, the angel said that the couple would have a baby boy, and that they should name him John. John would announce the arrival of Jesus.

Verse 14, again, the reason for the angel's visit was to bring good news, and the proper response for Zechariah was not fear, but joy. Joy and gladness. In fact, many will rejoice at the birth. Why? Because this is not just any baby. He will be great before the Lord. Because of his special calling, verse 15, in the same Old Testament tradition of the Nazirite vow, he must not drink wine, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before he would be born. That shows us John would be a prophet of God, and a very special prophet of God. The Spirit is given for bringing God's Word. God is on the move bringing His people back to himself, and the angel's appearance was the first in-breaking, the very first sign that God was taking action. God would soon bring His wandering people back to Himself!

Verse 16, with the Spirit and Word, what will happen? John will serve to turn others back to God. (Gk: Epistrepho.) This word is used to express this idea of turning others back to God elsewhere in the New Testament, and especially in Luke's writings of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. In verse 17, there is a comparison of John the Baptist and the ancient prophet Elijah! All of this, we are told, is making the people prepared for the Lord.

What is the task of turning someone back to God? It is not a physical task. You can handcuff a person and pick him up and plunk him down in a pew here, and physically, you have brought him to church, but you have not brought him back to God. So it is not a physical task. What is the task of turning someone back to God? It is a prophetic task. It is a task of words. It is to convert someone from sin or idolatry to loving and serving God. In Malachi 2:6, it is the task of the true priest to turn many from sin.

In 1 Kings 18, the Prophet Elijah saw it as his task to challenge people to come back to their God. When King Ahab assembled all the different prophets on Mount Carmel, "Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him.'" We are told that Elijah, "repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins." Why? Because the altar is how people returned to their God – by the blood of goats and lambs. Now, how do people return to their God? By the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus. Elijah the prophet was about the work of turning erring people back to the One true and living God. And John the Baptist would speak "*in the spirit and power of Elijah.*"

We turn people from ignorance to knowledge, from carelessness to thoughtfulness, from sinfulness to Godwardness. We help people get ready for the

coming of Christ. We are filled with the Holy Spirit to bring people back to God. He is the only hope for mankind.

## **2. Humbly being corrected by the Lord. (v.18-22)**

Verse 18, Zechariah, it seems, talked back to the angel in unbelief. I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. Did Zechariah forget that what God has done before, God can do again? Did Zechariah forget about other Bible characters? Did he consider Isaac, and Samson and Samuel? Though a strong believer and a righteous man, Zechariah found himself limited in the arguments from human reason. Was it possible for Elizabeth, an old and barren woman to conceive and give birth to a child? Medically, no way! Is it possible for God? Well, do we have a powerful God or do we not?

Very quickly, the story turns. In verse 19, the angel scolded the godly priest Zechariah. The angel identified himself as the angel Gabriel, and that God Himself had sent the angel to speak to Zechariah this good news message. In verse 20, a chastisement is given. Zechariah would be unable to speak until the time when it comes true, when the baby is born. Why? Verse 20, the angel said, “...*because you did not believe my words...*” The angel was a messenger of God, so it is the same as not believing God’s words.

Meanwhile, outside the temple... Verse 21, we are taken to outside the temple, where people were waiting and wondering what was taking so long! Verse 22, Zechariah finally came out, but he was not able to speak. The people understood that something had happened in the temple, that caused this. Verse 23, he went home.

## **3. Joyfully receiving God’s gracious removal of disgrace. (v.23-25)**

Verse 24, Elizabeth conceived! Verse 25, because there was a reproach on those who could not have children, Elizabeth rejoiced in the side benefit that her reproach would be graciously removed. This is a picture of what John the Baptist would do for all the people, and THAT is a picture of what Jesus would do for all the people. Remove disgrace.

Luke was writing this to remind us readers, as we approach the news that Luke is about to share about another birth, we must not to fall into the error of Zechariah. We must keep praying, “*Lord, increase my faith.*” If God says it, we believe it. Standing on the promises of God. Promise 1: God saves all that come to Him. Promise 2: God hears and answers prayer. Promise 3: God never leaves us, never forsakes us.

The Lord removes our reproach and our disgrace. The Lord removed the disgrace of Zechariah. The Lord removes our disgrace. The disgrace of sin removed by the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the good news that brings great joy.

### **Conclusion:**

1. A Christmas reflection for believers who are advanced in years.

It was in old age that Zechariah and Elizabeth began the task of parenting, to raise a little boy named John the Baptist. And what a job they did in that calling as parents!

It has been said that it is rare for a person to start out life well, rarer still for a person to run the race of life well, and rarest of all is for a person to finish well.

The post-retirement years can be the most fruitful time of a Christian's life.

Other people are watching us. We have been made pointers to Jesus, then this is the kind of persons God is calling us to be. To the very end.

May I speak to the older saints of God? People are already watching our lives. It is unknown to us just how much influence we have on the next generation, and even the generation beyond that one.

Look at this phrase again from verse 6, "...*they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.*" May that be our goal for our retirement years – to live more and more of a holy life!

Can I give you a hint? Read on. Watch for other people in the Christmas story who were advanced in years. The Christmas story is not just for the young. We sometimes wonder whether there are insights that are only given for those who have been thrust forward for decades.

2. One gift of Christmas is that God takes away our disgrace and reproach among people.

It is right on point with Christmas to remember that God removes our sin and our disgrace.

Did you ever do something as dumb as not believing the words of an angel who came from the very presence of God to bring you a message? Pretty dumb.

But I bet you have done dumb things that brought disgrace on yourself.

Did you notice in our story that started off so fairy-tale, that we stopped exalting Zechariah and Elizabeth? That is on purpose.

And when you fast-forward the story to their son, and he becomes great, and the country starts to turn around, and people start to exalt their son John the Baptist, He will famously say in John 3:30, "[*Christ*] *must increase, I must decrease.*"

Did John perhaps learn some of that from his father Zechariah?

At some point, we stopped talking about John the Baptist.

At some point, we stopped talking about David, and we only talk about the Son of David.

At some point we stopped talking about Aaron, and we only talk about the Great High Priest.

At some point, we stopped talking about Moses, and we only talk about the one like Moses who would come.

It is the consistent message of OT prophets and NT apostles.

God takes away our disgrace. This is only done by the one who came at the first Christmas. No one else matters. In the story of Christmas, where are we? We are not the righteous Zechariah. We are the Zechariah who did something dumb, and embarrassed ourselves. In the Christmas story, our role is the disgraced ones who needed rescue.

In 1 Timothy 1:15-17, *“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

We stopped talking about the apostle Paul. He was just a sinner named Saul, that God’s Spirit turned into Paul.

Every missionary is just a sinner saved by grace.

We stopped talking about the missionaries, the reformers, the highly-respected authors and preachers of our day.

We take up the core message of Christmas when we say Jesus came to remove our disgrace, and precisely because of our failings that were cleansed, we have become showcases of His glory.

In 2 Corinthians 4:5-7, Paul wrote, *“what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”* That is the whole point of Christmas. The gift of our disgrace being graciously removed. Don’t miss it.