

I. Introduction

Good morning! Today we are continuing our study in the Gospel of Luke. Last time we left Zechariah standing in the temple in front of the incense altar. The angel Gabriel had appeared to him and announced that he and his wife, Elizabeth were going to have a son, a son who would be John the Baptist. The angel's announcement spoke of how John would be great, and how he would be a blessing and a joy. And Gabriel also said, in **Luke 1:17**, **“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**



Gabriel's words here refer to the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6, which spoke of the prophet Elijah coming to prepare the way for the Messiah. Gabriel reveals that John the Baptist was to fulfill this prophecy by coming, **“in the spirit and power of Elijah.”** But notice what else Gabriel says. Who is it that is coming after John? It is the Lord! The angel Gabriel clearly indicates that the Messiah who is coming is the Lord God Himself. Zechariah and Elizabeth had longed to have a child for many years, but she had been barren. Now, God is going to give her a son, a son who will be a prophet like Elijah and who will prepare the way for the Lord to come.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Zechariah to announce this wonderful news at the very time that Zechariah is burning incense in the temple in Jerusalem. How did Zechariah respond to the angel's wonderful announcement? Let's take a look at Luke 1:18-25.

II. Scripture Luke 1:18-25 (NIV)

[18] Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." [19] The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. [20] And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." [21] Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. [22] When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. [23] When his time of service was completed, he returned home. [24] After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. [25] "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

III. Teaching

Do you remember Luke 1:6? Referring to Zechariah and Elizabeth, it says, **“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.”** Zechariah and his wife were upright, that is righteous, and they were also blameless. They were righteous by faith, and they were blameless before the law. That doesn't mean they never sinned, but it does mean that they confessed their sins and offered sacrifices in accord with the Law of Moses. In addition to being righteous and blameless, Zachariah was also a priest of the temple, trained in the Scriptures and in all things related to temple worship. Zachariah knew about the power and holiness of God. And yet, he doubted.



When the angel announced that a son was coming and that he would be a great prophet, what did Zechariah say? **Luke 1:18**, **“Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”** Zechariah said, **“How can I be sure of this?”** Basically, Zechariah is

asking for a miraculous sign. Let's think about this for a moment. Zechariah goes into the temple to pray and offer incense, and an awesome angel appears to him. When the angel appeared, Zechariah was terrified. But after the angel announces the wonderful news, then Zechariah asks the angel to give him a sign. Ahem, hmmm, Zechariah, isn't the appearance of the angel already a miraculous sign?

This is what people are like, including us, we are no different. God does a great miracle and a minute later we ask Him for a sign. Do you remember what happened in Mark 8? Jesus multiplied seven loaves and a few small fish and fed four thousand men. And then two verses later, the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven. Again and again, people ask for a sign right after a mighty miracle has been performed. But Zechariah is a special example; the angel miraculously appears and is still standing there and Zechariah asks the angel for a sign. Zechariah, we love you, but you have been breathing a little too much of the smoke from that incense you are burning. But we know in our hearts, we are no different.



You see, the angel is there, but Zechariah isn't really looking at the angel. Zechariah's mind is fixed on his circumstances. He says, I am old, my wife is old. Therefore, I cannot believe a baby is coming. But we need to get our eyes and minds off of our circumstances and on to the promises of God. If the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth tells He is going to do something, then we can be certain that He will do it. God always keeps His promises and His power and wisdom are without limit. Sometimes we have trouble understanding some of the promises of Scripture, but we can be sure that God will do all that He has said.



Zechariah doubted; he was slow to believe. But did Zechariah's lack of faith cancel the promise of God? Absolutely not. Some of God's promises are conditional, but when the angel announced that Zechariah and Elizabeth were going to have a son, there was no, "if." It was a clear announcement of what God was going to do. It did not depend on Zechariah's response at all. I am reminded of **2 Timothy 2:13**, "**if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.**" You see, it didn't depend on Zechariah, and it doesn't depend on us, the promises of God are guaranteed by God's character and His perfect faithfulness.



Zechariah messed up. He should have believed the angel and praised God. But he doubted, even though he was a man of faith. Yet, Zechariah's doubt did not cancel out God's promise. This is an encouragement for us. If you have placed your faith in Jesus and in His finished work on the cross, then you are saved. God has promised it. Even if you mess up, question God, doubt and lack faith, God will still do what He has promised. And God has promised, **Romans 10:13**, "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**" I am so happy that my salvation does not depend on me. If it depended on me, I would be in big trouble and I would be a nervous wreck worrying about it all the time.



But instead, I can have peace, because my salvation doesn't depend on me; it is promised by God and guaranteed by His perfect faithfulness. That doesn't mean that it is okay to sin, it is wrong and when we mess, there will be consequences. But we don't have to worry about God rejecting us or about losing our salvation. Wherever God has begun His good work, he will finish it. **Philippians 1:6** says, "**being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**"

If you died today, would you go to heaven? Are you sure? If you have called on the Name of the Lord, trusting in Jesus for your salvation then you can be sure. In fact, we ought to be certain of our salvation. Anything less is a failure to believe in God's promises. **1 John 5:13** says, "**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.**" The Scriptures give us the promises of God and when we believe those promises we can be certain of our salvation. And when we are certain, then we can have the peace of God in our lives. Make a clear choice to believe in Jesus and to trust in His perfect love and then say goodbye to fear. **1 John 4:18**, "**There is no fear in love. But**

perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

I could go on about this a bit more, but we should get back to Zechariah. **Luke 1:19-20, “The angel answered, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.”** Gabriel was not overly impressed with Zechariah’s doubts and questions. After all, when you are a messenger of God, a powerful angel sent directly from the throne of God, you expect to be taken seriously.

Zechariah’s lack of faith does not cancel the promises of God, but there is still a consequence. And the consequence is that Zechariah will be unable to speak until the child is born. This sounds like a punishment, but I think it was really the grace of God.

First of all, this is a blessing on Elizabeth. I mean, really, this is like a dream deal for a lot of ladies. Those of you who have children, be honest, when you were pregnant, weren’t there days when you wished that your husband couldn’t talk? I mean, for nine months, the whole time of the pregnancy, Elizabeth could say anything that she wanted to and Zechariah couldn’t talk back. Morning sickness, swollen feet, back aches and head aches, getting bigger every day. Elizabeth could complain about it all and she never had to worry about Zechariah making dumb jokes or embarrassing remarks. For nine months, a husband who listens and never talks, some women would pay a lot of money for that deal. Of course, I think Elizabeth was probably so happy to be pregnant that she probably didn’t complain at all.

And although Zechariah suffered some, I am sure that the experience became a blessing for him also. There is an important lesson here. When we question God’s promises, our unbelief does not cancel out the promises, but it does cause us to miss out on the joy that we could have had by trusting God. Zechariah missed the joy of telling everyone about the angel and about God’s promise of a son. But Zechariah received something else. He received an opportunity to learn to think before speaking, to reflect on what things should be said and what things should be left unsaid.

God loves us, each and every one. But sometimes the Lord takes away things in our lives that are preventing us from growing in our faith. If the Lord takes away your job, your health, your beauty, or any other thing, then you can be sure that He will use that loss to bring new blessings into your relationship with Him. Perhaps Zechariah was proud of his ability to preach an eloquent message, or perhaps he had a habit of speaking before thinking, or maybe he just talked too much and needed to listen more. I don’t know. But I am sure that Zachariah learned to hear the voice of the Lord in new ways through his experience of more than 40 weeks of silence. If the Lord places a trial in your life, then you can be sure that the Lord will redeem it and turn it into a blessing.

After his time at the temple was completed, Zechariah went home and, hmm, and gave his wife some flowers, and a nice box of chocolates and then got out the special scented candles. Or something like that. Anyway, this child was to be a miracle, but not like the miracle of the virgin birth that Mary experienced. I am sure that Zechariah and his wife proceeded in the normal way to pursue the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise. But the baby was still a miracle from God, because the two of them were too old to have children without some special help from the Lord.



Luke 1:24-25, “After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”” In those days, a woman who had no children was looked down upon as a disgrace. Some probably even have considered her cursed. But the Lord showed grace to Elizabeth and gave her child in her old age. Elizabeth went into seclusion for five months. This wasn’t to hide her pregnancy, after all, it is during the last months when pregnancy becomes obvious, and by then Elizabeth was no longer in seclusion. The Scripture does not explain it, but I think that perhaps Elizabeth spent those months in seclusion in prayer and thanksgiving before the Lord.

The time came for the child to be born and all of the relatives wanted to name the baby Zechariah after his father. But Elizabeth said that the child must be named John. To settle the issue, they asked Zechariah. **Luke 1:62-64, “Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. [63] He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.”**



Zechariah had been thinking about this for a long time, and when he suddenly regained the ability to speak, he knew what he wanted to say and he opened his mouth in praise to God. No more doubting, no more fear, only praise and thanksgiving. Being unable to speak for months must have been very difficult, but Zechariah had learned something important. God always keep His promises.

IV. Conclusion

Next week we will take a look at the story of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary. Unlike Zechariah, Mary believed the angel the first time and did not need a special lesson. In fact, if you look closely, you may notice that in Luke, the women are often more faithful than the men. But it is interesting to notice another thing also. Zechariah doubted and Mary believed. But both Zechariah and Mary end up at the same point: trusting God, being filled with the Spirit, and prophesying about the blessings of the Messiah.



Perhaps you are more able to identify with Zechariah and his questions rather than with Mary's simple faith. Perhaps you have put your foot in your mouth and said some things you should have left on said. Or maybe you have done some things you shouldn't have done. If so, there will probably be some consequences that come from those mistakes. But be reassured, the promises of God will not fail. God's grace is sufficient and His Word is certain.

V. Closing Prayer