

(Luke) 02 - Zacharias

by Ed Miller

Luke's Gospel emphasizes Jesus as the Son of all mankind, reaching out to the neediest of mankind, and providing certainty through historical fact, childlike faith, and the object of faith.

Duration: 1:12:19

Scripture: Genesis 5:24, Genesis 6:9, Genesis 15:6, Job 1:1, Matthew 6:33, Luke 1:6

Topics: "Zacharias"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of David and Goliath and how David was able to defeat Goliath because of his impaired peripheral vision. The speaker then compares this to the surgical miracle performed by Jesus to replace the ear that Peter cut off. The speaker emphasizes that Dr. Luke, in his account of this miracle, simply states the fact without trying to rationalize it. The sermon also highlights the significance of the first chapter of Luke in breaking the four hundred years of silence from God and preparing the way for the study of Luke.

Transcript

Focus our affection and our eyes upon the Lord Jesus. We'd ask again this evening that you would turn our eyes unto him and that we might, by beholding him, become more like him. We thank you for every part of the Bible in a special way tonight for the gospel of Luke.

Will you guide our fellowship and our meditation as we look at chapter 1? We thank you, we can trust you for this because we ask it in the all-prevailing name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Okay, I'll ask you to turn please to Luke chapter 1. Welcome to our abbreviated study of the gospel of Luke.

For the past two weeks I've been trying to get the heart of this book before your hearts. The book of Luke presents our Lord Jesus as the Son of all mankind. It's different from the other Gospels because it's not just the Son of all the Jews.

There's a great emphasis on the Jewish nation in the other Gospels. But here it's the Son of all mankind. Luke chapter 3 and verse 6, all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

And then one of our key verses, Luke 19.10, in Luke 19.10, the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost, all monosyllable. And it illustrates Luke's purpose, that Christ didn't just come for circumcised flesh. He came for all flesh and to seek and to save all that was lost.

In the gospel of Luke we see the Lord Jesus reaching out to the neediest of mankind. He goes after the poor in Luke. He goes after the captive, the lame, the blind, the helpless, publicans and sinners, harlots, tax collector, the prodigal son, the thieves, lepers, the downtrodden.

That's the emphasis in Luke. The great appeal of this gospel is that Jesus is the Son of all mankind from the lowest, the down and outer and the up and outer. He just reaches everybody in this book.

Jesus is the Son of all mankind and all those who are in union with Christ will become sons of all mankind. That's one of the things God wants to accomplish in our hearts in the study of Luke, is to make us like Jesus. And He was the Son of all mankind and as we're conformed to Him, we also will become sons and daughters of all mankind.

Now studying Luke is not designed to fire you up to start some new program to win the laws. They don't need some new program. There's plenty of programs out there and they don't need that kind of thing.

But what the message of Luke does, it will make you see Jesus. And when you see Christ by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, when you see Him as He is in Luke, then you'll become like Him as He is in Luke and naturally you will want to pour out your life for those who are the most helpless. That's just a byproduct of seeing Jesus.

Now in our introduction lesson, I called attention to six great emphases in the Gospel of Luke. I'm not going to review them, but I'll just list them for you. Luke is a great book on mission.

Luke is a great book on the down and outer. Luke is a great book on the Son of Man. Luke is a great book on joy and rejoicing.

There's more songs in Luke. I think the only other book that's as happy as Luke is the book of Psalms or maybe Philippians in the New Testament. But otherwise, this is just filled with joy.

Starts with joy, joy in the middle, ends with joy. Only in this book will you find the expression leaping for joy and joy in heaven and the Father rejoicing and so on. It's a book of joy.

And then Luke also emphasizes amazing contrasts. And we saw that last time. And finally, it might surprise you to learn that it's the Gospel of Luke, even more than the Gospel of John, that emphasizes the Holy Spirit.

And so the Gospel of Luke has that as one of its unique emphases. I won't review those great themes, but keep your eye open for those as you study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit this wonderful Gospel of Luke. Let me just get the outline we're following before your heart, and then we'll pick up our new material.

We divided the book into three parts, some divided into four parts. I've chosen three. The middle part is rather long.

Chapter 1, verse 1 through 4.13, we just call that the preparation for the Son of all mankind. That's all about John the Baptizer and the preparation of Christ and His circumcision, His temptation up to the baptism. Just the preparation for Him to become Son of Man.

And then chapter 4, verse 14, all the way to 19.28, that's the ministry of the Son of Man. Up through 9.50, you have His Galilean ministry, and then after that you have His Judean and Parian ministry. In the Galilean ministry, that's where you get all His miracles.

In the Parian ministry, that's where you get all His parables. But both of those, the Galilean and the Parian ministry, present His ministry where He becomes the friend and teacher of all mankind. That's the middle section.

And then finally, chapter 19.29 through the end of the book, chapter 24, the victory of the Son of Man, taking us further than any other gospel. Not only the cross, not only the resurrection, but Luke ends with the ascension of our Lord Jesus as High Priest into heaven. And so that's the divisions we're looking at.

When we closed last time, we were discussing the first four verses. In chapter 1, I'll only remind you about verse 3, the word Theophilus. Luke writes, not only in the Gospel of Luke, but also in Acts, to his friend Theophilus.

Now, we don't know who Theophilus was, but we know the meaning of his name. It comes from two words, theos, which is God, and phileo, which is love. The word Theophilus means a lover of God.

And I like to word it this way. You say, Luke wrote to Theophilus. Yes, he did.

But he also wrote to lovers of God. He wrote to all Theophiluses. He wrote to every one of us who is a lover of God.

And so we're very thankful for the meaning of his name. Say, how am I going to get the most out of Luke? Approach it as a lover of God. If you come to this book, Loving Jesus, you're going to get the most out of this book.

If I come to this book, Loving Jesus, it was written for me. Look at chapter 1, verse 4, please. It was designed to give the lovers of God certainty.

Verse 4 says, so that you might know the exact truth about what you've been taught. Luke wrote to his friend so that this lover of God might be filled with assurance, filled with certainty, filled with persuasion. Now, usually when we think about a book of assurance, we think of the little epistle of 1 John.

Over and over again in 1 John we read, that ye might know, that ye might know. It's a book of assurance. But also Luke is written, that ye might know.

God doesn't want lovers of God to wonder, or to guess, or to wish, or to hope. He wants them to know. And Luke is a wonderful book designed to instill certainty in every lover of Jesus, every lover of God.

Now, let me take up from there our new material. And I want to show you that Luke drives home this idea of certainty in at least three ways. You'll see this all through the book.

Number one, Luke stresses historical fact. The whole book is based on the fact. He just states it.

He gives historical reference. Luke is a historian. Nobody does it like Luke does.

Read Luke. Read the book of Acts. He points to contemporary dates.

He points to political figures. Just glance, if you would, at chapter 3, verse 1, as an illustration of this. In chapter 3, verse 1, "...in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee..." Tetrarch means the land was divided into four parts.

A tetrarch is a ruler over one of those four parts. "...tetrarch of Galilee. His brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Uteria and Trachonitis.

Licinius was tetrarch of Abilene." Why does he give us those facts? You see, he wants our faith to be built upon solid ground, on fact. It's not like some of the cults who claim they had some special vision somewhere on a hill far claim, in a lonely spot that no one can verify, and that they received tablets or something else from God, and then they were taken away before anybody could investigate. Luke says, I want you to investigate the facts.

I want you to know that this is verifiable. In a lot of the cults, nothing can be proven. But Luke lays it all out in history.

Even unbelievers can look up in the profane literature, and in the secular world, and go back and prove that Pontius Pilate was there, and that Herod was there, and so on. They can check the records on those things. Imagine in a courtroom today, if someone was on trial for something, and he brought in 500 eyewitnesses.

You say, wow, that judge would be happy to see him. If he got 500 eyewitnesses that can be examined and cross-examined, then it's pretty solid. Well, there were more than 500 witnesses to whom the Lord Jesus appeared after his resurrection.

And that's Paul's point in Corinthians. He said, look them up. They're still alive.

Go ask them. Examine them. Cross-examine them.

Everything about the Christian faith is built on historical fact. It sort of reminds me about that old TV program I used to watch, Dragnet. Remember Sergeant Joe Friday? Just the facts.

Just give me the facts, ma'am. Only the facts. Well, that's Luke.

For example, thanks, Pat, for that. Christmas. Christmas is the birthday of Jesus.

That is a historical fact. So what we do is we take the fact, and from the fact we get a doctrine. The doctrine is the incarnation of Christ.

But that's built on the fact. Then from the doctrine we get an ethical outworking. If he's God, you better obey him.

But it all starts with the fact. The same thing with Good Friday. Good Friday can be dated.

It's a fact. Jesus died on this fact. It's verifiable.

From the fact we get the doctrine called atonement. From the doctrine we get the outworking. If Christ died for us, then we better trust him.

But it all starts with the fact. The resurrection of Christ, Easter, is a fact. From the fact we get the doctrine.

The doctrine of the resurrection. From the resurrection we get the outworking. If Christ is alive and Lord, we better surrender.

We better yield unto him. The ascension of Christ is a fact. There were eyewitnesses.

It's history. From the ascension we get the doctrine. The doctrine is the mediatorial high priesthood of Christ.

From that we get the ethical outworking. We can come boldly to the throne of grace because we have such a high priest that is touched with the feelings of our infirmity. We can find grace to help in time of need.

And so in our faith he always begins with the fact and then moves to the doctrine and from the doctrine to the application of the doctrine. And what was true continues to be true. What lies ahead for us is history.

Jesus will come back again. That's history. And they're going to record it as fact.

Jesus will set up a kingdom. There will be a judgment seat and so on. It's all fact.

And out of the fact comes the doctrine and from the doctrine the outworking of that doctrine. So that's the first thing Luke does. And all the way through the book you're going to see he calls attention to dates and names and tetrarchs and high priests and this priest was here and this priest was there so that you can look it up.

He wants you to look it up. He wants you to investigate because the purpose is that lovers of Jesus might be certain. Your faith will not develop through possibilities or probabilities.

You don't need my opinion. You don't need anybody else's opinion. You need fact.

I need fact. And when there's fact then faith has a solid ground. And so Luke says, I'm going to just give you the facts, only the facts, ma'am, nothing but the facts.

And that's what Luke does. I said there's three ways Luke drives home certainty. Not only does he give us historical fact but the second thing he does and he does it all the way through, he stresses the simplicity of childlike faith.

All the way through the book you're going to see that over and over and over again he appeals to childlike faith. Remember in Colossians 4.14 Luke is called the beloved physician. Luke was a medical doctor.

The whole book, some say, is written in terms of these medical expressions. You go through Luke in Acts, I don't know if you're familiar with Harnack, but Harnack wrote a book on Dr. Luke and he calls attention to the fact that all of his writing is just colored by these medical terms and references. I don't know if that's true or not but I know how technical doctors can be.

And sometimes you talk to a doctor and he throws around these 50 cent words and your head spins. You don't even know what he's talking about. And when he signs a prescription you can't read his writing.

Doctors are like that. And you don't always know what a doctor is saying. Doctors are always looking for the natural explanation for everything.

There's a reason for this and a reason for that and let's be reasonable and reason this thing out. Some time ago I had to go to an ophthalmologist in order to see if I needed reading glasses. I started seeing spots and all that foolishness and lights and so on.

Well, the doctor found out, I won't call his name but he's in town, the doctor found out I was religious. And you know, once a doctor finds out you're religious he wants to discuss religion. And so he proceeded while he had that thing in my eye to explain to me how David killed Goliath.

See, I didn't know before but now I know. Because Goliath had a pituitary problem and that's why he was nine foot nine because he had that problem. Now, when you have a pituitary problem, says my ophthalmologist, your peripheral vision is impaired and you only can see out in front of you.

You got this problem, you see through a tunnel. And what David did, the little rascal, is he scooted on the side, the blind side of Goliath when he wasn't looking because his peripheral vision was impaired. And then pow, he let go of that rock and he slung his sling.

And that's how he got Goliath. Well, that's how doctors reason. They've got to have this explanation for everything.

All of that to say, Dr. Luke didn't try to rationalize anything. Dr. Luke doesn't hem and haw when he records, for example, the surgical miracle our Lord Jesus did to replace the ear that Peter cut off Malchus. He just gives you the facts, man.

He says, and Jesus picked it up and put it on and it was done. Thank you, Dr. Luke. And he just tells us the facts.

He doesn't apologize. He doesn't hem and haw. He has certainty on his mind and he wants us to be certain.

I love the doctrine of the virgin birth, that Jesus was virgin born. Now, I would have believed that if Matthew told me. I would have believed it if Mark told me.

I would have believed it if John told me. But I'm so glad that God let Dr. Luke tell me about the virgin birth. Because Dr. Luke's a doctor and he would know about those kind of things.

And he didn't try to give some rational explanation. Now, Luke, the Bible says, Luke was not an eyewitness. He never saw Jesus, never heard Him teach, never saw a miracle that He did, never heard Him preach, never heard the parable.

But Luke chapter 1 tells us that He sought out every eyewitness. He sat them down. He questioned them.

He wanted to know. He investigated. And from reading chapters 1 and 2, I have no doubt in my mind, He got hold of that blessed virgin Mary and sat her down and began to interview her.

There are some things in chapter 1 and 2 unless God Himself, by a miracle, and He could do that, directly told Luke. He had to talk to Mary. There are some secrets here only Mary knew.

And she just poured out her heart to Dr. Luke. And anyway, look how he records it. Take chapter 1, 26.

Now, in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the descendants of David. The virgin's name was Mary. Dr. Luke doesn't wonder about it.

Was she just a maiden? She was a virgin. Luke tells you. And then jump down to 34.

And Mary said to the angel, How can this be since I am a virgin? And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And for that reason, the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age.

And she who was called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, the bond slave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

Oh, that's just the facts. Isn't that glorious? Dr. Luke doesn't try to explain it and he doesn't question it. He doesn't hem and haw.

He lays it out to be received by childlike faith. You're going to see that here in the first two chapters. You're going to see it all through the book.

Again, I'm so thankful that God chose Luke to tell me about the virgin birth. There's one other way Luke, in his Gospel, stresses certainty. He not only underscores historical facts, he not only calls attention to childlike faith, but Luke ever holds the Lord Jesus Christ Himself before your heart as the object of faith.

And what I mean by that is, in one sense I say He appeals to childlike faith. But He doesn't do it in such a way to turn your eyes to faith. Luke always turns your eyes away from faith and to Christ the object of faith.

For example, in this book, Matthew says that Jesus received children, that parents brought their children but only Luke tells us that parents brought their, the Greek word is infant of days, babies that were only days old, they brought to the Lord Jesus. Now, if I were writing it, I would probably emphasize what faith these parents had to bring their babies to Jesus. That's not how Luke writes it.

He's not talking about the faith of the parents to bring their babies to Jesus. He calls attention to Christ and His great willingness to receive babies and to bless. That's a different direction altogether.

If He was reluctant to receive them, if He stood back and on some ivory tower someplace, they'd never bring their babies to Jesus if it looked like they would be bothering Him. You wouldn't bring your baby to somebody right in the middle of His sermon and hand your baby to someone who's trying to speak. If you thought for a moment He didn't want that baby.

But the Lord Jesus was all smiles and He had His hands outstretched in invitation and welcome. Those women couldn't help but give Him their babies. He's standing there like this.

Oh, bring your little baby here. And those who dared stand against Him, even His own disciples, He rebuked them. And He said, don't you say that.

You let those babies come of such as the Kingdom of Heaven. And it wasn't faith that brought babies. It was Jesus who was there willing to receive the babies.

And faith becomes easy when you see Christ. Now, you're not going to have trouble running to Jesus if you see how wonderful He is. We put all this emphasis on faith, looped into it.

You know why? Because He wants you certain. He wants you sure. And once you start looking at faith, you wonder, did I believe enough? Was my faith strong enough? Did I believe soon enough? Did I use the right words? Was I sincere? And you begin questioning all these things.

That's the opposite of certainty. And so Luke takes your eyes off faith and turns them to the Lord Jesus Christ. It wasn't faith that restored the prodigal back into the family privileges.

It was the Father's heart. It was the Father's love. It was the Father's forgiveness and the Father's joy.

And so over and over through this Gospel, he calls attention to Christ Himself. So Luke wants us certain. All you lovers of Jesus, he wants you to know.

And that's why he stresses fact. And that's why he stresses childlike faith. And that's why he calls attention to Jesus who is the object of faith.

I'm going to ask you to turn to Luke 1 if you would. If we were going to continue our lessons on Luke, I'd probably approach this a little differently. But since I don't want to leave anything up in the air with some loose ends, I'll be a little more general as we look at this marvelous chapter.

Now, without the slightest doubt, there's no question about it that we're going to leave most of this chapter untouched tonight. For one reason, just glance at it. There's 80 verses in this chapter.

This is one big chapter. And so we can't do justice in one lesson. But let's look at what we can look at.

In Luke 1, Luke tells two stories. One is the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the father of John the Baptizer. I still have the habit every now and then of calling him John the Baptist.

He's not the Baptist. He's the Baptizer. I try to correct that, but every now and then I keep forgetting.

He was the forerunner. He was the one who baptized. I don't want anybody to think, you know, oh, he wasn't Presbyterian.

He was a Baptist. That kind of thing. He was a Baptizer.

So one is the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents-to-be of the forerunner of the Son of Man. And then the second is Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she was going to become the mother of the Son of Man. The chapter begins and ends with Zacharias, Zacharias' story, verses 5 to 23, and then verses 57 to 80.

And in the middle of that is the story of Mary in verses 24 to 56. Now, of course, there's overlapping because Mary goes and spends three months with Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth. Now, we'll only this evening get as far as Zacharias.

So let me just try to get that before your heart. Before we look at the Zacharias story, let me try to tie in this first chapter of Luke. Show how it fits right here in the Bible itself and then how it prepares us for the study of Luke.

As I suggested in our first introductory lesson on Luke, that in this first chapter, God is going to break the silence that He's held for 400 years. As you know, between the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the first book of the New Testament, Matthew, there were 400 years when there was no word from God. He'd ever talked to a prophet.

There was no dream, no revelation, no oracle, no sign from heaven. God was silent. In one sense, He wasn't silent.

He was very noisy because it was during those 400 years that He was preparing Rome and preparing the Greek language and all of that. Very noisy years. But as far as revelation is concerned, they were very silent years.

So our hearts would naturally want to know when did God break the silence? And what did He say? And what were the first words after 400 silent years? Well, they're right here in the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 1, verse 5. Let me describe the scene for you. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias of the division of Abijah.

He had a wife, or Abijah. He had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Now both Zacharias and his wife were from the priestly family.

If you notice verse 8 and 9, Zacharias was chosen by Lot to enter into the holy temple to burn incense there on the brazen altar of incense. Now, let me give you some facts. You don't need to remember this, but I think it will help set it up.

Aaron was the first high priest. He had four sons. Two of those sons were killed by God in a special judgment.

The other two sons began to grow and grow until 24 families of priests sprang out of those two sons. The problem was that this Aaronic family line was very prolific, and they got so many priests, they didn't know what to do with them all. There were priests everywhere.

The problem is there's only one temple, and thousands of priests. How can they all minister? And so it came to pass that they had to draw straws. They didn't draw straws.

They cast lots. But it's the same idea. In the days of David, this was finally organized.

1 Chronicles 24 tells us that he divided the priesthood into 24 courses. In other words, each course was selected, and they would each serve for two weeks. And then they'd cast lots to see who got to serve in the temple.

And wherever the lot fell, all right, let's roll for the showbread. And they'd roll for the showbread. All right, let's roll for the seven-pronged candlestick.

Who's going to take care of that? And they would cast lots for all of the duties. Luke 1, 7. Luke 1, 7 says that both Zacharias and his wife were advanced in age. We don't know how advanced.

God doesn't tell us their ages. The Aaronic priests were not under the same law as the Levites in Number 9 that they had to retire at age 50. So these old priests did not have to retire, and they're all hanging around waiting for the lot to fall.

They're looking for a duty. We're told that some priests actually lived and died and never served God in the temple because their lot never came up. They lived and they died, and they never served God.

Josephus, the historian, tells us in New Testament days that just in Jerusalem, without counting the other places, there were more than 24,000 priests waiting around for their lot to be drawn. Now you get, with that as a background, you can understand a little bit what it must have meant to this old priest to have the eighth course picked and then to have his name come up to have this marvelous service to stand in front of the veil of the Holy of Holies and minister incense in the brazen altar of incense. This was such an

honor.

In verse 9, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord. We have no way to know this, but it's possible that this was the only opportunity in his life that he ever had to do this. And it's very probable that that's so as well.

And so he received this rare privilege, and according to history then, he got all through his ceremonial cleansing and all his five baths and seven washings, put on the white robe and the bells along the bottom, and barefoot he stood before this marvelous altar of incense. Now at that time, as today, many were just playing priests. They were just going through the motion.

They were just going through the ritual and so on. Not Zacharias and his wife. They were not playing a game.

Look at verse 6, please. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. Now, blameless is not faultless.

That's not saying that they had no sin. But these folks were real, and these were priests whose hearts were open to the Lord to minister unto the Lord. And on this great day of privilege, an amazing thing happened in the temple.

Chapter 1, verse 11, an angel of the Lord appeared to him standing at the right of the altar of incense. Don't read that la, la, la. According to verse 19, the angel answered and said to him, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.

I've been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. The hero of God. That's what Gabriel means, hero of God.

The hero of God. The angel that stands in the presence of God. We know two angels by name.

Unless you hold the apocryphal books, then you know seven angels by name. But we know two angels by name, Gabriel and Michael. Gabriel kept showing up as the angel of mercy.

Michael keeps showing up as the angel of the wrath of God. Gabriel hadn't appeared on the earth for almost 500 years. The last time he showed up was to talk to Daniel.

And now all of a sudden, there's Zachariah in the temple, and this Gabriel appears. Luke 1.12, Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him. You better believe it.

You'd be troubled too. That expression, fear gripped him, in the original language, it has to do with an outward tremor. In other words, he shook in his boots.

He was trembling. He saw this angel just show up. And I don't know what the angel looked like, if he was all light and bright and all that.

I don't know. But it scared the daylights out of Zachariah. And what message did the angel bring? Because now for the first time in 400 years, heaven is about to speak again.

He hadn't talked for 400 years, and now he speaks, and here's what he says, verse 13. These are the first words since the end of the Old Testament. The angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your

petition has been heard.

Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You'll give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

He'll be great in the sight of the Lord. He'll drink no wine or liquor. He'll be filled with the Holy Spirit while he's yet in his mother's womb.

He'll turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous so as to make a people prepared for the Lord. That's what the angel said.

Now listen as I quote the last two verses of the Old Testament. Malachi 4, verses 5 and 6. Here's how the Old Testament ends. Behold, I am going to send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with the cur. The Old Testament ends with the promise that Elijah would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. So the question comes.

Now God breaks the silence. Elizabeth's going to have a baby. Is that Elijah? The Old Testament says Elijah's going to come.

Zechariah said, here's a baby. You're going to have a baby. He'll come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Is that the fulfillment of that prophecy? In Matthew 11, verse 14, Jesus was talking about John the baptizer. He made this comment. If you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah who was to come.

Jesus said John the baptizer was Elijah who was to come. You say, well, he came as the forerunner of Christ in his first coming. Is that the complete fulfillment? No, John was just a partial fulfillment.

Elijah's going to come again. You say, how do you know that? I know that because after John the baptizer died, after he was beheaded, they came to Jesus and said, tell us about the end. What's going to happen? What's going to come? And in Matthew 17, verse 11, he said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things.

So after John was dead, Jesus said Elijah's still coming. So John partially fulfills the prophecy. He prepares the way before the first coming.

Before Jesus comes again, there will be another Elijah. Will it be Elijah in person, the one of the Old Testament? Some think so. I don't know.

Maybe it will. He never died. He might come around just to die.

I don't know if it's going to be him or someone in the spirit and power, but you see right at the beginning of Luke how God unites the Old Testament and the New Testament. I laid great stress on the fact that Luke is the only Gentile writer of the Bible, and he's writing to Gentiles. I said it this way.

You'll never find a more non-Jewish book than the book of Luke. In fact, all through the book of Luke, the Jews were getting pretty mad because of his emphasis. It looked like he was sort of rubbing the

Samaritans in their face from time to time.

He's so non-Jewish. But here's an amazing thing. Though there's no more non-Jewish book than Luke, I have never seen more Jewish chapters than Luke chapter 1 and Luke chapter 2. There is no more Jewish opening to any book than you have right here.

It opens in Jerusalem, the holy city. It opens. The scenes are the holy temple of God.

The main characters are priests. Zacharias, Simeon in the next chapter. The setting is the hour of prayer.

There's the altar of incense. There's the holy place. There's the spreading of the incense.

It's almost like Luke is standing on the edge of two dispensations. He reminds me a lot of that strong angel in Revelation 10. In Revelation 10 it says, And he put one foot on the sea and one foot on the land.

Well, that's how I see Luke here. He puts one foot in the Old Testament and he puts one foot in the New Testament. And he starts off Jewish and then he turns to the Gentiles.

He starts off with Israel and he turns to the church. And by the time you come to his second book, the book of Acts, it's all church. And now the church has taken the place of Israel.

It's possible, and many think, that Zacharias himself is the old priest, symbol of the old system. And no, Mary is a picture of the church. It's possible Zacharias is a picture of the old system and Mary is a picture of the new system.

The old unbelieving priest and the young maiden who is trusting in the Lord. Whether or not that's true or not, I'm not 100% sure, but I know this. He starts off very, very Jewish and he ends up very, very Gentile.

But I want to call attention to that. And so he introduces us right at the beginning to the coming of Christ and he spans the gulf and he unites the Old and the New Testament. One more thing Luke 1 does to prepare us for the study of this Gospel is, and I've already suggested it, that as he tells his story, he will tell it so that the truth, that certainty comes through childlike faith, is going to be developed.

Almost every story, he tells you how you can be sure through the simplicity of childlike faith. In Luke 1, verses 5-25, Zachariah is an example of unbelief. And then in verses 26-55, the Virgin Mary is an example, an illustration of childlike faith.

And then the chapter ends in verses 56-80 where unbelief is turned to childlike faith. We won't have time to get into all those sections. Let me share with you some thoughts on Zacharias and unbelief.

A couple of verses to set this up. Look at chapter 118. I want to bring two verses together.

In chapter 118, Zacharias said to the angel, How shall I know this for certain? I'm an old man. My wife is advanced in years. When Zacharias heard that he and his aged wife were going to have a baby, he said, How can I know this for sure? I'm an old man and my wife is an old woman.

As far as the original language is concerned, it's almost identical with the words Abraham said in Genesis chapter 15. And for the same reason. He said, Give me a sign, Lord.

How am I going to know this? Since my wife is old and I'm old and Eliezer, is he going to be the one? And so on. Now, don't get me wrong. I can certainly understand the incredulity of Zacharias here and why he

staggered.

The announcement bewildered him. Hold that and look at verse 34. Mary said to the angel, How can this be since I'm a virgin? You see, Zacharias was told an impossible thing.

Mary was told an impossible thing. To fulfill Zacharias' impossible thing, God would have to overcome nature. To fulfill Mary's impossible thing, God would have to transcend nature.

They're both impossible. And both asked the question. He said, How can it be? She said, How can it be? He gets charged with unbelief.

She gets credit for faith. How come? We need to discuss that. Those words sound almost identical.

But in verse 20, there's no question about it. Because you did not believe my words, he is guilty of unbelief. Let me read the whole of verse 20.

And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my word, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time. He was struck dumb. He couldn't speak.

Some Greek scholars say that that word that is in one translation speechless, unable to speak, includes deafness. In other words, he was not only dumb, but he was also deaf. Notice verse 62, the end of the chapter.

It says, They made signs to his father as to what to call him. Why did they speak to Zacharias in signs if he could hear? We speak to my son John in signs because he's deaf. We speak to my daughter-in-law Jody in signs because she's deaf.

We speak to my wife's brothers and sisters-in-law in signs because they're deaf. And I have an idea that Zacharias was not only dumb, he was deaf. And unbelief closed his ears as well as unbelief closed his mouth.

And so the law of silence was both on his ears and on his lips. But Mary believed. And though she questioned, God says there's no unbelief in her question.

Luke 1.45, when she was greeted at Elizabeth's door, Elizabeth made this comment, verse 45, Blessed is she who believes that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord. So there's no question. Zacharias doubted.

And Mary believed. The old priest doubted. The young teenager believed.

And I can see because of that why some would suggest that this is a symbolic story also of Israel and the church. I incline to that myself. Some would say the main difference between what Zacharias said and what Mary said is this.

Zacharias wanted evidence. He wanted proof. He wanted a sign.

Whereas Mary only sought life. An explanation. She didn't want a sign.

In other words, Zacharias said, How can it be? Mary said, How will it be? See, that's not the same thing. Zacharias was almost saying, How can you do this? Mary was saying, How will you do this? She just wanted to know how it was going to happen. Such a wonderful thing.

Obviously, God saw a difference. And at least we can apply it this way. Sometime, you and I will not be able from the outside if someone asks a question.

You don't know if that's a question of doubt or a question of faith. God sees the heart. God knows if it's a questioning question or an inquisitive question.

Some say, Never ask why. Why not? It's not wrong to ask why. If you ask it with an inquisitive heart, God always sees the heart.

And you have every right to know. And you can ask God those questions. And He'll write down faith or unbelief as He sees the direction of your heart.

Well, let me home in a little closer on Zacharias' unbelief here. I'm going to try also to make it intensely practical. I've told you many times it's not fair that I squirm alone under the light of God's Holy Spirit.

So if God speaks to me, I've got every right to pass it on to you and make Pat squirm here a little bit too. The first observation is from verse 6. It says, They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. Wouldn't you love that if God wrote a verse like that about you and your family? Oh, I'd love it if He wrote that about me and my family.

What a tremendous testimony. These were wonderful servants of the Lord. And God said about them the same things He said about Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Job and so on.

These were believers. And so we're going to look at the unbelief of Zacharias. But it's not the unbelief of an unbeliever.

It's the unbelief of a believer. Believers have times when they are filled with unbelief. Usually we think of unbelief, we think of scoundrels and rejecters of the truth, people who are closed to the Lord.

Zacharias was no scoundrel. He loved the Lord. He was ministering unto the Lord.

He was not playing games. His heart was right. He was looking unto the Lord.

And yet he became an unbelieving believer. I like to word it this way and say, unbelief at times is found in the choicest servants of God. Unbelief at times is found in the best of God's servants.

We think the temptation of the enemy is either to tempt you to pride or tempt you to immorality. Satan's clever. He wants you to think that.

But I have an idea that Satan would rather tempt you to unbelief than immorality. If you say, I fell into immorality, you think, oh, what a serious thing that is, falling into immorality. It's not as serious as falling into unbelief.

May God open our eyes on these things. Unbelief is terrible wherever it's found. But it's most terrible when it's found in the saints, in the dear people of God.

I'd love to tell you that unbelief is never in my heart. But I don't think it would be fair to lie to you. And so, we'll leave it there.

Let me look at Zacharias' unbelief with you and maybe call attention to some of the subtle ways unbelief can show up in a believer. And notice verse 13, And the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias.

Your petition has been heard.

Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you'll give him the name John. Verse 13, Your petition has been heard. Yeah, God says your prayer has been heard.

And I'll bet you, Zacharias looked Gabriel in the eyeball and said, What prayer? To have a baby. I am an old man now, sir. Do you know how long ago I asked you that? Try to understand what was happening here.

Zacharias, Gabriel shows up. They're old people. And he comes in.

Your prayer has been heard. What prayer? Oh, you mean when I first got married. Yeah, I remember that.

A thousand years ago, I made some requests. Maybe his prayer was bigger than, Can my wife have a baby? Maybe it was including Messiah coming and all of that. But I think the way the record reads, it was pretty much you asked me one day that you could be a father and your wife could be a mother.

You asked for a baby. I wonder how many years had passed. Verse 7 says, They're both advanced in years now.

I wonder if he even forgot that he had prayed so long ago. It was forgotten. May I just encourage you, brothers and sisters in Christ, that old prayers that have been unanswered are not lost.

God keeps records. God keeps a registry of your prayers. He might just show up and say, Hey, I've come with the answer to your prayer.

And you might have to dig out the old hallelujah box and figure out what prayer that was. You might have to look it up. One aspect of unbelief is limiting God and putting a time schedule on God.

We ought to be real careful before we try to make God run His train by our clock. He's not going to do it. He keeps His own clock and His own schedule.

I think many times we prayed and maybe have prayed for something for years. If an angel suddenly came into my study with some old prayer I'd prayed when I was just in first love and I'd just come to trust the Lord, I'd say, What kind of bureaucracy are you running up there? Why the delay? Where have you been? I would have liked this answer a long time ago. What's all the red tape? You see, God takes our prayers very seriously.

And I think sometimes we don't. I think sometimes we don't. We just say it.

And if He doesn't answer, well, that's all right. Then it doesn't matter. We just forget all about it.

But it's very, very serious to the Lord. I hold that a minute and look at verse 18. The second thing Zacharias did was he said, How shall I know this for certain? He wasn't too impressed with the angel who stands in the presence of God standing at His side with God breaking silence after 400 years.

He said, Give me a sign. You mean beside me standing here? You want another sign? Give me proof. Give me evidence.

Zacharias was a priest. And as a priest, he was responsible for knowing the Old Testament. And certainly there was precedent.

He knew that Abraham had asked for a sign in Genesis 15. And that Gideon had asked for a sign in Judges 6. And Hezekiah had asked for a sign in 2 Kings 20. And Ahaz was given a sign in Isaiah chapter 7. It sounds spiritual to say something like this.

But I just want to be sure. I just want to be certain. Be careful when you say that to Luke.

Because he wrote this that you might be certain. He also knows what it means to be certain. He said, I don't want to make a mistake.

I don't want to go the wrong way. So, I'm going to ask God for a sign so I can be certain. If God does this or the other thing, if He sells the house, or if He gives me the raise, or if I get accepted into this school or that school, or if I get the promotion, or if I win the lottery, or something like that.

We say, if God does it, then I'll know. Then I'll be certain. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're going to have to learn this and relearn it.

Certainty does not come from signs. Certainty comes from the simplicity of faith. You are not more certain by some sign.

Matthew 12, verse 39 says, an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. We have the only sign that we need, and that's the sign of Jonah. The sign of resurrection life.

And there is no other sign. Signs don't prove anything. Zacharias said, give me a sign.

Well, he got a sign. God shut his ears, and God shut his mouth. And that became the sign.

And it's a terrible thing when unbelief actually closes our ears and shuts our mouth. They were all sign-seeking. Zacharias was supposed to come out, as I told you last time, with the words of Numbers 6 on his lips.

After he had finished with the incense, he was the priest that was supposed to come out and quote the benediction. The Lord bless you and keep you. Lord, make His face shine upon you.

Be gracious unto you. Lord, lift up His countenance upon you. Give you peace.

He came out and said nothing because you can't bless God's people when you're unbelieving. God takes away the privilege to bless the people of God when there's unbelief. He closes your mouth.

And you can't do it. And even if you open your mouth, He can still close it as far as the blessing is concerned. So unbelief sometimes puts a time limit on God.

Unbelief sometimes looks for signs. And then, of course, this is so obvious, but unbelief ever, in all the stories of the Bible, you call attention to this, ever looks to circumstances in an unhealthy way. And Zacharias looked at his wife and said, oh, she's old.

Her womb has dried up. He looked at himself and he said, I'm old. This can't happen.

This is impossible. Yeah, it's impossible for me. It's impossible for you.

It's impossible for us. Remember what Jesus said to believing Mary? Chapter 1, verse 38. Nothing shall be impossible for God.

Nothing's impossible for Him. And so when God gives us a Word, it don't matter about circumstances. No circumstance can contradict it.

I sure admire Mary's faith when I realize that her impossibility had no precedent. What I mean by that is Zacharias' impossibility has a precedent. You go through the Old Testament and over and over again, you saw old people in barren wombs being opened and overcome.

Sarah, and Rachel, and Rebecca, and Hannah, and so on. God had done that before. Zacharias was unbelieving when he had testimony.

God did it for me. He can do it for you. But sweet Mary, she had no precedent.

God had never let a virgin conceive. God was about to do a new thing for Mary without a precedent, and she still believed God. What an amazing faith this young girl had.

Zacharias buckled with many examples at his fingertips. And yet Mary, even though it had never been done before, she just believed God. About 14, most people say.

Just a young maiden. So unbelief, you know, like Peter walking on the water there and looked to the circumstances and gets afraid. Believers can have that kind of unbelief.

But with God, nothing's impossible. Job might be covered in his boils and Elijah's brook might dry up and Peter might be in that stormy sea and Paul might be bitten by a poisonous viper. God's the same.

The brook might dry up, but God doesn't dry up. So let Sarah laugh and let Philip count the fish and the loaves and the multitudes and let the unbelieving spies bring back an evil report. You and I are called to believe God.

God said it and He's going to do it. Well, this was the unbelief of Zacharias. He limited God in time.

He asked for a sign and he looked to circumstances. And those things can happen to believers. All Zacharias was looking for, I think, was certainty.

All he really wanted. He's not vicious. He's not malicious.

He's just saying, Lord, I just want to be sure. Luke says, you want to be sure? Then trust God. That's how to be sure.

Certainty comes through the simplicity of faith. Now one more thing about his unbelief. Unbelief is not only found in the choices of God's servant.

Not only are these the characteristics of unbelief, but this observation, since it's the most subtle, becomes the most insidious of all. And that is that unbelief often raises its head in the day of light, in the day of God's mercy, and God's visitation. Here's what I mean by that.

There's something about this that's very mysterious. I'm not saying I can explain it. But I have experienced it in my life and I've seen it in the lives of others.

And it's something like this. Now I told you that God had been silent for 400 years. What that means practically for Zacharias is Zacharias never had a word from God.

God never spoke to Zacharias. And yet his faith was doing pretty good without a word from God. When this story opens, he's doing great.

He's blameless and righteous and going after the Lord and he's open to the Lord. And God doesn't speak to him. And then God didn't answer his prayer.

Evidently he had made a petition. And God didn't answer that probably for years. He's doing great.

He's surviving that. Under trial, God didn't answer prayer. He's doing super.

He's doing fine when God's silent. He's doing fine when God delays and God doesn't answer his prayer. Now in chapter 1 and 2, you're going to have a lot of signs.

You're going to see angels and stars and virgin births and opening barren wombs and even the providential throwing of the lock is all miracles of God. But before this, there were no signs. Zacharias didn't have any signs.

And when he had no signs, he was doing great. If you would have interviewed Zacharias, no word from God. How's your faith? Super.

God's not answering your prayer. How's your faith? Great. No signs from God.

How's your faith? Great. Then God comes with good news and answers him. Unbelievable.

There's something amazing about that. He gets good news. Only good news.

Your wife's going to have a baby. When he had trial and the heavens were closed and God wasn't speaking, trial was delayed. His faith was fine in the day of mercy, in the day of grace, in the day of visitation, in the day of life.

He buckles. And I'm suggesting that that is subtle. Because you usually think, oh, under the trial, I hope my faith can hold up.

Usually you'll do well under trial. Usually when things are going wrong, it crowds you to Christ. You'll do well.

And the heavier the burden, the more you'll run to Jesus. And He increases the burden to help you run to Jesus. That's how He lightens the burden, by making it heavier.

Because you keep putting it on and putting it on, and finally you wise up and get out from under it. And you run to the Lord. And so He releases you that way.

But then sometime when the day of blessing comes and God comes through and He sends His angel and He sends good news and He answers your prayer and He brings you a gospel of joy, you better be alert because unbelief might raise its ugly head at that time. And that's a subtle, subtle thing. I've seen it in my own life.

I've experienced it. It's easy to trust God on a rainy day. The sunny day comes along and all of a sudden you fold.

And sometimes you don't even know why. You have to scratch your head, how stupid I am. How ridiculous for me to doubt God in this situation.

But we're made of clay. I remember when Lillian and I were first married, and I say this, it's sort of a rebuke to my heart, but we kept for a couple of years, we kept a suitcase packed. Because it was my heart, it was her heart.

If God ever called us, we were ready to go. Anytime. Anyplace.

Any cost. And she kept washing the clothes and putting them back in the suitcase. We kept that suitcase packed.

And right on top of it was that sign. We made a sign to God. And we put a sign, anytime, anyplace.

And our prayer was, Use me, Lord. Call me, Lord. It doesn't matter where.

I want to be a missionary. I want to be used. And He didn't answer.

And so, as time went on, I needed my underwear. Time went on. The suitcase got unpacked.

And time went on. The sign came off. Time went on.

The roots went down. And time went on. We got some junk.

And we got some stuff. And they got roots. And the roots had tentacles.

And the tentacles began to grab things. Things fading. This world.

I wonder if Gabriel came to me tonight and said, Your prayer has been answered. It's time now to go to New Guinea. I would go, Ah! That's what happened to Zachariah.

And in the day of answered prayer, you can lose it. Because we get so attached to this fading world. It's passing away.

And we get our roots and our tentacles gone. And we get all involved in this. And I'm just suggesting that we need to be very, very careful.

There's so much to think about now. So much to release now. So many roots to be severed.

May God help us all before unbelief shuts our mouth and shuts our ears to the great truths of God. It's a tragic thing when God's blessing brings unbelief. And God has to deal with us because of that.

Well anyway, this is a look at Zacharias. Unbelief is found sometime in the godliest people. Unbelief sometime tries to tie God down to our time schedule.

Unbelief sometime needs a sign. Show us a sign. Unbelief sometime looks in an unhealthy way at circumstances and we cry, it's impossible.

Unbelief sometime folds in the day of light and the day of the greatest mercy. Now, if we were continuing, the next step would be to look at Mary the opposite of this. And let's look at faith.

And let's describe it. I encourage you to do that on your own. Study Mary.

Especially how she's a picture of the church. And may God guide you as you go through the Gospel of Luke. We'll close there.

Comments or questions? Father, we thank You so much for Your precious Word. Thank You that certainty comes into our heart through the simplicity of faith. Lord, we don't want to be unbelieving believers.

We want to be like Mary. We just want to be Your bond slaves and we want whatever You want for us. We'll leave all of the performance of that to You and to Your Holy Spirit.

Instruct us, we pray, through our meditation and make these things real in our lives. Now I pray, Lord, for everyone here that You take them forward in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ through the progressive unveiling of Jesus through this book by the miracle of the Holy Spirit. Thank You that You're doing it now and You're going to continue to do it in our lives.

Lord, we also thank You for all of the refreshments that are provided and for those who have lovingly provided not only once in a while, but through the years. Put Your blessing upon them. Thank You for this food.

Nourish our bodies with it, we pray. And give us good fellowship. We pray that we might edify one another.

We ask in Jesus' name.

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