

Luke 1: Doubt, Disbelief, Delight

Good morning church. So very good to have you with us, and those joining us online. Welcome. For the online crowd I encourage you to engage with the livefeed. We have a dedicated member of the RCM team that monitors the feeds every week. And puts some notes out on it.

For those that worshiped with us last Sunday, we finished up a series called Reconnect: Back to the Basics with an emphasis on the priority of the Word of God to the life of the Christian. And we used last week to serve as a springboard of sorts for our summer/fall plan to read through a portion of the Bible each week as a church.

Because where the Bible speaks, God is speaking. God, through His Word, has given us everything we need to live a life that brings Him glory and honor, and praise. As this book reveals to us the person, work, and ways of Jesus.

But...for us, if you are a Christian, if you have turned from your sin and are trusting in Jesus alone to save you...**how we receive God's Word really matters.**

And we saw some of this in our reading for this past week – I hope that you spent some time reading with us the early chapters in the Gospels – but hear me loud and clear, how we receive God's Word really matters.

We're going to be in Luke chapter 1 this morning. And what we'll see is a couple examples of how certain people received God's Word. First, the example of Zechariah. Turn with me, if you have a Bible, to Luke 1. We'll cover a lot of ground in Luke 1 – I'm going to read some, and share some things, we'll kind of have a little back and forth, ok.

READ Luke 1:5-7

⁵In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

V5 – Herod the Great (not because he was awesome, but because he built a lot of stuff).

Z & E – **righteous** in God's sight. They were Old Testament saints, declared righteous because of their faith in the promise of God. A faith in God that affected how they lived. A faith that produced obedience (really the only type of faith that saves, is one that produces obedience).

V7 – But they had no children...We lose at least a part of the magnitude of a couple, “**well along in years,” that had no children.** Huge social stigma. Almost would have been looked at as if they were second class citizens. She would have likely carried a weight of shame.

But see that, in spite of not being able to have children – they were righteous and worshipped the Lord.

BACKGROUND V8-10

- 2x per year his group of priests would be called to the temple to serve
- Lots of priests
- They would cast lots for the privilege of going into the inner sanctuary to bring incense
- And low and behold, Zechariah’s lot is chosen – now hear me, this is a **once in a lifetime type of situation for him.**
- **ILLUSTRATION: Getting called to preach the convention sermon at the SBC...**
- Zechariah goes in, and the rest of the priests are waiting outside praying.

READ 11-13

¹¹ An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

- V12 – Z was terrified. We have to see that, Biblically, angels are incredible beings. We have this nonsensical picture of angels like the angel soft toilet paper baby. Not true.
- Seems as though whenever an angel appears in the Scripture, they almost always say “don’t be afraid.” Like, no one’s going to be scared of the angel soft baby, but every one of us would be terrified at the presence of a real angel.

This is an incredible message that he’s receiving

The angel would tell Zechariah of the greatness of John the Baptist’s ministry.

- V16 – He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.
- V17 – He will go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah
 - Elijah was a great and mighty prophet of God in the OT
- V18 - ...to make ready for the Lord a prepared people

Now, let’s use our imaginations for a minute. Imagine praying and praying and praying for God to act, to move in a way. Imagine the years that Zechariah and Elizabeth had been praying for a child. And God was silent. Imagine how they may have labored in prayer for God to bring them a child. Day after day, month after month, year after year and nothing. That’s what is happening here. Then, in this moment of worship and prayer, an angel appears to Zechariah and tells him, “You never even dreamed this could be God’s answer to your prayer...Your boy’s gonna be a prophet that everyone in the church for thousands of years is gonna know about.”

But remember – HOW WE RECEIVE GOD’S WORD REALLY MATTERS. And if you don’t know this story already, maybe the message title will give Zechariah’s response away: Doubt, Disbelief and Delight is the message title – Zechariah responds with doubt and disbelief.

READ V18

¹⁸ “How can I know this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.”

A doubt filled question

How can I know...Like, you ever want to jump into the story and ring someone’s neck? Right here. How can I know. Like, “Bro, you just saw an angel that had you shaking in your boots with fear.” But then, remember the story of Abraham and Sarah...Zechariah was a priest and he would’ve known this stuff. Abraham was 100 years old. So you have the testimony of the angel, and you have the testimony of the Scripture. And still, “How can I know”.

Zechariah is stuck in doubt-filled disbelief.

Hear me friends – how we receive God’s Word really matters. You and I, we don’t need a word from an angel, or a sign up in the clouds. We have this book, every single word breathed out by God, that is 100% trustworthy, 100% sufficient, all that we need to see how to live a life that brings glory and honor to God. Peter would write that “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

????How do we so often respond to the Word like Zechariah? From my own life, and calling to pastor and then plant the church.

I listen to this band of reformed rappers called Beautiful Eulogy. And they have a line in one of their songs that says “I’ll give you a sign that’s obvious. One of the most supernatural acts is that God through His Word has actually revealed everything pertaining to life and godliness.”

Zechariah was a priest, a God fearer, a righteous man. He would have known the word. He would have known the legacy of Abraham. And then he gets a word from the angel. And rather than receiving it with joy-filled worship, he received it with doubt and disbelief.

Luke 1 would continue with another miraculous appearance by an angel. This time to a young girl, that was engaged to be married to a guy named Joseph.

READ Luke 1:26-33

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged^[c] to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came to her and said,

“Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you.”^[d] ²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰ Then the angel told her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.”

So we have, 6 months later, another incredible message delivered by an angel. Angel appears, and again, tells her not to be afraid. Tells her what’s going to happen. An incredible miracle – that she will conceive and give birth to Jesus. In Matthew’s gospel we’re pointed to the importance of His name – that he will save his people from their sin.

And so here’s this teenage girl, that receives a message. And she asks a similar, but different question:

READ 34-37

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?” ^[e]

³⁵ The angel replied to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Now, on the surface it may seem like Mary’s asking the same thing Zechariah was asking. But I think there’s a huge difference. Remember – Z was asking “How can I KNOW”. Mary’s asking “How can this be?”

The suggestion from the text is that Mary’s genuinely confused. And the angel gives her the answer – nothing will be impossible with God.

Then in V38, we see Mary’s posture of joyful delight and surrender

READ v38

³⁸ “See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

It’s important for us to understand that – Mary doesn’t have all the answers, she knows what the angel said to her, she’s been given a Word from God, but she doesn’t know all the answers. What’s Joseph going to think? What are my parents going to think? What will my friends and family think? Will I have to wear a scarlet red A around my neck for the rest of my life?

But from the text of this scripture, we see here a contrast between these 2 ways to receive the Word of God.

Let me ask you, when things don't go according to YOUR plan. You have to have a focal point – something to focus on. And if you focus on your problems that's all you're going to see! When problems (unavoidable as they are) pop up? When you flat out don't have an answer. Do you trust in the character of God, the goodness of God, the unchanging faithfulness of God; or do you focus on your problems?

Friends, we have to receive this Word with gladness, with joy, with delight, with surrender. Focus on it. Meditate on it. Allow your problems to be subject to it. To come under its authority. Because how we receive it really matters. We can be so focused on our problems that we completely forget the character of God. And I think this is how Zechariah answered the angel.

-OR-

We can be so captivated by the character of God, that WHEN we have problems...

- We see them
- We acknowledge them
- BUT we always see them through the lens of God's character and continue to find joyful delight in God's Word
- Because in Christ, for those that have turned from their sin and are trusting in Jesus alone, in Jesus you are a child of God. He loves you in unimaginable ways. His plans are for your good and His glory alone. And as His child, you can trust in His character.
- THAT'S THE ONLY WAY WE WILL EVER RECEIVE THE WORD WITH DELIGHT-FILLED OBEDIENCE.

Friends, there has never been a clearer picture of the character of God than the person, work and ways of Jesus. God in the flesh. That has come offering life to all who will repent and believe. And I beg you today, turn to Jesus and find life. Turn from your sin and turn to Jesus and find meaningful life and purpose now, right here, regardless of your circumstances, and forever life with him when your days on earth are over.

And for many here you're like, Paul I've turned to Jesus → to you keep turning and keep trusting in this Word. Because how we receive this Word really matters.

PRAY.

