

“The Promise of the Forerunner Fulfilled”
(Luke 1:1-25)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

This morning,

We’re beginning the Gospel of Luke.

Each part of God’s Word is important,

But for different reasons:

The OT is important

Because it gives us the background of the Gospel –

It shows us the problem –

How we disobeyed God

And became liable to His judgment –

What God planned to do about it –

He would send the seed of the woman

To crush the head of the serpent,

And in so doing, would give His life –

It narrows down who that Seed would be –

Through promises and prophecies –

It even tells us *when* He would come.

It’s also important

Because there are many things in it

That still apply today:

Most notably, the Moral Law.

But the NT is arguably more important

Because it shows us the fulfillment of all these things –

Especially in the four Gospels –

If we could only have one book of the Bible,

We would do well to have one of these.

It's interesting that the Lord has given us four –

When it comes to establishing the truth of anything,

We need at least two witnesses:

Moses, “On the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed”
(Deu. 19:15) –

He's actually given us more when you consider

That Luke talked to *many* eyewitnesses

As he was researching his Gospel.

B. Preview.

Let's begin by looking at some introductory matters:

1. First, why we believe the author is Luke.

He doesn't identify himself as the author,

Nor does his name appear in the book –

Since he wasn't a part of this history –

But we know the one who wrote this book

Also wrote the book of Acts –

He tells us in Acts 1:1-2,

That his Gospel is what Jesus began to do and teach –

And that Acts is what He continued to do and teach

Through His apostles (Acts 1:1-2).

In Acts, we see the author

Sometimes traveling with Paul,

And sometimes not.

When we compare his movements

With Paul's known companions,

And the style, reading level and detail

With which he writes,

The most obvious choice is Luke –

On this the historic church was unanimously agreed.

2. Second, we know the audience is Theophilus:

The same as in Acts.

We don't know much about him

Aside from what Luke writes here:

His name means "lover of God" –

Which could be his real name

Or a pseudonym to hide his identity –

Certainly, it's a name that describes all believers.

The phrase "most excellent"

Was a title used for Roman officials –

Which could be the reason for the pseudonym –

That Luke dedicated the book to him

Could mean that Theophilus was his patron:

Perhaps the one who funded the book's publication –

There was no printing press in that day:

Hand written copying was expensive,

More than Luke would have been able to afford.

If that's true,

Then he likely intended the book

For a wider audience.

3. The most important thing to note here

Is the reason Luke wrote it:

He says to Theophilus, "So that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (1:4).

Theophilus had been taught/disciplined –

Perhaps by Luke,

Perhaps by others –

But the Spirit moved Luke –

Where others had started, but not finished;

With Paul's supervision –

To provide an even more precise account

Of the work and teaching of Jesus Christ

That he might know "the exact truth."

It's important to know *truth*.

That's why God gave us

His whole, inspired and inerrant Word;

Why He preserved it;

And why He calls us to study it.

With that in mind,

Let's see what it is

That God wants us to know

From the Gospel of Luke:

First, He wants us to see:

The fulfillment of His promises.

The Old Testament closes with these words

The Lord spoke through the prophet Malachi:

“Behold, I am going to send you 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, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse” (4:5-6).

He didn't speak again

Until that silence was broken here –

About 400 years later –

When He sent His messenger,

Gabriel,

To announce the birth

Of this *forerunner* to His Son.

The prediction the OT closes with

Is the fulfillment Luke begins with.

II. Sermon.

A. First we see *when* this happened:

“In the days of Herod, king of Judea” (Luke 1:5).

Back then,

Time was measured

In relation to who was ruling:

These were the days of Herod:

Herod the Great,

The one who rebuilt the temple,

And later sent his soldiers to kill the Messiah.

B. Second, we see the one through whom

This prophecy would be fulfilled: Zacharias.

Zacharias was a priest,

A descendant of Aaron, Moses’ brother –

Only Aaron’s sons could be priests –

He was of the division of Abijah –

There was, of course, only one Temple

The priests would serve in on a rotating basis.

The division of Abijah was the eighth of twenty-four.

Each division ministered for one week, twice a year (*Reformation Study Bible*).

His wife, Elizabeth,

Was also descended from Aaron (v. 5).

Why did the Lord choose them?

We see, “They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord” (v. 6).

By God’s grace, they were doing

What He calls us all to do:

Living for His glory.

They could only do this by His grace –

They didn’t become this way on their own –

But they improved what He gave them better than most –

Which was also because of God’s plan.

C. Third, we see their problem:

They were childless, and being old,

Had no natural hope of having children (v. 7).

In our culture,

Children are often seen

As something that gets in the way.

In the Jewish culture,

They were a blessing –

Which is how we should see them:

Solomon, “Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Ps. 127:3-5).

Zacharias and Elizabeth

Had been praying for years

That the Lord would grant them children (v. 13) –

But so far He hadn't answered.

The Lord often makes us wait

Before He answers our prayers:

How long did Abraham pray for a child

Before the Lord finally gave him one?

How long did Joseph suffer in prison

Before the Lord brought him out?

How long were the Israelites

Enslaved in Egypt,

Before the Lord sent His deliverer?

How long was it from the time Jesus was promised,

To the time He came?

The Lord hears as soon as we pray;

When we pray according to His will,

He tells us He's already answered them –

But we often don't see His answer

For quite some time,

Because *we're not ready to receive it* –

We need to remember,

The Lord has His timing.

D. Fourth, we see the Lord's answer:

While Zacharias was ministering to the Lord –

When he entered the Temple to burn incense –
Which because of the number of priests,
He may have only done once in his life –
While the people were praying outside
That the Lord would receive his offering on their behalf –
Gabriel appeared to him (v. 11).

At first Zacharias was afraid (v. 12),
But Gabriel comforted him:
The Lord had heard his prayer;
Elizabeth would bear a son;
And they were to give him the name, John (v. 13) –

“John” means gracious –
A gift given graciously by God –
Which is an apt description
For everything God gives us:
We don’t deserve it;
It’s purely a gift of His grace –
Especially children.

E. But fifth, this gift wasn’t just for them –

Just as the things the Lord gives us
Are not purely for ourselves,
But that we might use them to help others,
So it was with this child –
“Many will rejoice at his birth” (v. 14):

Why?

“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord” (v. 15):

Jesus, “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist!” (Matt. 11:11).

“He will drink no wine or liquor” (v. 15):

He would be a Nazarite from birth –

One who was completely devoted to God.

“He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb” (v. 15):

He would be a new creature,

Sanctified and empowered before he was born –

Something that isn’t the norm –

But which explains his reaction

When Mary comes to visit Elizabeth.

“He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God” (v. 16):

“It is he who will go *as a 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 ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v. 17).

He would preach the Law and repentance,

With the power and effectiveness of Elijah,

To get the people ready for the coming of their Lord.

F. But sixth, Zacharias didn’t fully believe:

He had a hard time accepting

That this could happen –

He had been praying in faith,

But now that God was answering,

His faith was faltering.

Here again, we see God's grace:

He didn't withdraw His blessing from Zacharias,

But helped him through His discipline:

Luke, "The angel answered and said to him, 'I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time'" (vv. 19-20).

When he came outside to speak to those

Who were concerned because he was taking so long –

Thinking that maybe he had died because of some sin (v. 21) –

He found that he couldn't speak (v. 22).

We see this discipline had its desired effect,

When it comes time for John to be born.

G. Epilogue.

Finally, when his service had ended,

He returned home (v. 23);

And as the angel said,

Elizabeth conceived:

And they were both filled with joy

Because the Lord had given them a son,

But even more,

He had given them the forerunner of the Messiah (vv. 24-25).

We may need to wait a while

To see the Lord's answer to our prayers,

But He will do what He's promised:

Through His Son, Jesus Christ,

Because He is faithful.

Paul, "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

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