

Be Amazed – At God’s Plan . . . Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

Few weeks into our series/theme – Be Amazed

Last week we talked about why we can and should be amazed at God’s Word as found in Luke – hope your desire to get into God’s Word was re-kindled/fired up for 1st time

This week, we turn to the account of John the Baptist’s birth in Luke 1

Right off the bat, hit w/ *God’s amazing plan* for his life; Even details

Though we trust that God has such a plan for our lives, we often question it because we can’t see it

He usually only gives us just enough light for the step we’re on, and no more

And so we wonder, we doubt, and we struggle – taking matters into our own hands because we don’t think they’re in his

That’s where this account of John the Baptist’s birth helps – it reassures us that God is firmly in control of our life, just like he was his

Turn to Luke 1:5

Instead of reading the whole passage at once, we’ll take it section by section

5 – *days of Herod, king of Judea*; 37BC-4BC

Zechariah – not the same Zech as the prophet in the OT

A priest of the division of Abijah – Abijah was a descendant of Levi, the line of priests

Abijah was one of 24 heads of clans that were originally chosen by King David c.975

BC to be in charge of the temple, sacrifices, and worship (1 Chron 23-24)

Form the daughters of Aaron – she too came from a very godly background/heritage

6 – *they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly* . . .

Blamelessly doesn’t mean perfect; It means their hearts were right, and they were

devoted to God as shown by their careful observance of, and obedience to, the law

7 – *But* . . . if you were a God-fearing Jew in that culture, it was a very normal to expect to be blessed with kids because . . .

A lack of children was considered an affliction by God (Gen 16:11)

A form of God’s disapproval (Gen 30:1,23)

A punishment for sin (Lev 20:20-21; 2 Sam 6:23)

And it carried a heavy stigma of public disgrace

Not only was Elizabeth barren, but there was no longer any hope because were too old

Luke is driving home the point that if *any* couple deserved children, *they* did

They were righteous, obedient, God-fearing people

They weren’t guilty of ongoing sin; They hadn’t done anything to grieve God

And it doesn’t seem fair

Sometimes God’s plan doesn’t seem fair (v5-7)

Some prosper with hard work, others don’t; and God’s plan doesn’t seem fair

Some of you are painfully separated/divorced from your spouse and family, while other people virtually ignore theirs, and yet are intact; and God’s plan doesn’t seem fair

Some of you have lost loved ones (parents, children, siblings) prematurely, while others take their loved ones for granted; and God’s plan doesn’t seem fair

Some of you are like Elizabeth and can’t have children, while others seem to get pregnant without even thinking about it; and God’s plan doesn’t seem fair

Some of you have cancer or a chronic illness in the prime of your life, while neighbor is in perfect health and more or less abuses their body, and God’s plan doesn’t seem fair

I don’t have any trite explanations for you; What I can tell you is this . . .

• When God’s plan for your life doesn’t seem fair – God knows, God cares, God *has* plan God knows – **Ex 2:23-25**

God cares – 1 Pet 5:5-7

Humble yourselves . . . casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

God *has* a plan

Jer 29:11 sums up that truth as good as any – *I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

God has a plan for your life; You may not know it, and you may not like it at times; But he has a plan

The best part is that if you trust Jesus as your Savior and Lord, it includes heaven

It’s quite possible that God may allow or ordain unfair circumstances in your life to make you long to be with him, in heaven

So even when his plan doesn’t seem fair – live for him

Do like Zech and Eliz (6)

And never stop praying (13)

Never, ever stop; God may answer no, but he’ll always listen and he always cares

And if at some point he answers yes, your joy will be overflowing

Sometimes God’s plan doesn’t seem fair; On the other hand . . .

Sometimes God’s plan is too good to be true (v8-25)

8 – *when his division was on duty*

Each division served twice each year for one week at a time

At that time each division probably had 300-700 priests in it

9 – *he was chosen by lot*

This would have been the pinnacle of any priest’s career; What you lived for as a priest

You could only be chosen once, and many never had the privilege

His adrenaline would have been pumping

It was the nearest thing to the very presence of the Lord at that time

Probably the biggest moment of his entire *life*

10 – *hour of incense* – offered in the morning and evening

11 – *on the right side of the altar of incense* (**temple slide**)

Here’s Zech, serving God in the Priest’s Court having washed in the laver

The faithful Jewish men preparing to pray under the colonnades during the incense

offering, while the Jewish women were outside in the Women’s Court

The sacrifice still burning on the huge altar

And he steps into the massive sanctuary, the Holy place, by himself

As he does, he sees the table of ceremonial bread on one side, the golden candle-abra lighting the way on the other, and the altar of incense directly in front of him,

with a curtain behind it separating him from the sacred Holy of Holies

And he sees *an angel of the Lord* – that’s heart attack material

15 – *he must not drink wine or strong drink*

He must be set apart for special use by God

There must not be anything that would diminish the Spirit’s control/filling

Nothing that would compromise his role

No hint of wrong doing that would taint his message re the Messiah/Christ

17 – *In the spirit and power of Elijah*

These two verses are a clear reference to **Mal 4:5-6** where God says . . .

For 400 years, God's people expected Elijah himself to show up before the Messiah
But here's the angel saying that Zech's son would do the same thing that God had said in Mal
His head must have been spinning

With benefit of hindsight, we can understand what Zech probably didn't at that point
That John the Baptist *is* the Elijah prophesied by Mal (Mt 11:13-14; 17:10-13)
He was not to be Elijah *himself*, but one *like* him
So angel says – *he* [John] *will go before him* [Jesus] *in the spirit/power of Elijah* (17)
Influencing the attitude of his religious contemporaries like Elijah
Boldly proclaiming an unpopular message like Elijah
An agent of moral change like Elijah
Opposed by the political powers like Elijah
Zech must have been spinning about all this

18 – *How shall I know this?*

How can I experience this? How can this happen?

19 – *I am Gabriel* – Excuse me? Do you know who you're talking to

20 – *until these things take place*

Zech had a lot of time to think about that one

What did he mean – until John completely fulfilled all that the angel said?

Or until his birth and naming?

22 – *mute* – could be both unable to speak and unable to hear, but doesn't have to

Zech couldn't believe God's plan because it was too good to be true

The entire Christian life falls into this category – sometimes it seems too good to be true

God became flesh, lived among us, died in your place for your sins, came back to life, ascended to heaven, and is one day is coming again for those who believe, to be together with him forever in heaven

That's too good to be true; So good it's almost unbelievable

And if Christ had not accomplished those things at a real time and place in history, and if the Bible didn't explain them, we probably *wouldn't* believe it

Let's face it, what God's doing in our church is too good to be true

It's so amazing it's hard to imagine and hard to believe sometimes

The question is – Have you fully embraced it?

Have you fully embraced that fact that God is doing an amazing work here?

Or are you still holding on to your skepticism and doubt?

Don't dismiss God's plan just because it's too good to be true

- Because when God's at work – in your life, in your SG, in our church, in this world – it will *always* be too good to be true; That's the God we serve; So . . .

Believe it (18 ff)

No matter how amazing, how off the charts, how awesome, how miraculous – believe it

Treasure it

When God is doing a too-good-to-be-true work in your life – treasure it

Treasure his amazing plan; That's what Elizabeth did (24)

Give God the credit (25)

25 – *Thus the Lord has done for me* – give God the credit

After recording the birth announcement of Jesus, he returns to John's birth in vs57 . . .

59 – *circumcise the child*

This was in accord with God's covenant with Abraham to set his people apart, and signify his covenant with them (Gen 17:9-14)

62 – *made signs* – he was obviously mute *and* deaf, otherwise he could have heard them

66 – *What then will this child be?*

What role will he fulfill in God's amazing plan?

Clearly the hand of the Lord (the hand of guidance and power) was on this child, but it didn't make sense to them

Sometimes God's plan doesn't make sense (v57-66)

That's what the neighbors were experiencing; They couldn't figure it out

Do you find that to be true in your life on occasion? I do

No matter how I look at it; No matter what I do . . . God's plan, doesn't make sense

This truth became painfully obvious to Becky and I when God began to put within me a desire to plant a church

For some time we just pondered it in our hearts with the leadership at HBC-GE

Until one day an opportunity presented itself – that was March of '04

A group of people that had some familiarity with Harvest wanted to plant a church and needed a pastor (different part of the country)

So they contacted the HBF, and they said Rob's the one, and put us in contact w/ them

We were thrilled with the opp and began praying and preparing to that end

However, we soon found out that the group who wanted to plant the church, didn't feel the same way – they weren't very excited about us

Initially they said it was because they had a problem with *me*, but it quickly became obvious that had their eye on someone else

So here I was, totally recommended by the Fellowship, totally ready to go and excited about it . . . but flat out rejected by this group

And it didn't make sense; And we didn't understand why

Until two months later in May, when we learned of *this* possibility

And within a short amount of time, we realized that the plan that initially didn't make sense, was the same plan that God used to bring us here; and now makes perfect sense

And we wouldn't have it any other way

Sometimes God's plan doesn't make sense . . .

But in the end, God's plan is always best (v67-80)

It was true of God's plan to bring us here, it's true in your life, and it was true for Zech *Filled with the HS* (67) – controlled by him, under his influence . . .

Zech *prophesied* to that effect – proclaimed the truth of God as revealed, and applied it to the situation at hand

Says in v68-75 – God has visited us in Christ to save us, preserve us, and protect us so we can serve him all our days

68 – *redeemed* – saved them by paying a price for their lives

69 – *horn of salvation* – a powerful means of saving us

– *in the house of David* – the powerful savior is from David's lineage

71 – *saved from our enemies*

Safe now, spiritually (no one can snatch us out of the Father's hand)

And one day yet to come, completely safe physically, in heaven

73 – *his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham*

Which was to multiply his offspring and bless all the nations of the earth through him
(Gen 22:17-18)

Then Zech turns his attention to his son . . .

77 – *to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins*

To help them experience salvation through repentance and forgiveness

78-79 – *whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high*

It's from God and because of his tender mercy that Jesus will come to us from heaven

He will be the light of the world, like the sunrise, spreading righteousness to those in sin
and facing death

79 – *to guide our feet into the way of peace*

Jesus came to lead us into a reconciled relationship with God, no longer at odds with
him because of our sin

Zech may have thought at one point in his life that God's plan wasn't fair

With the angel's announcement, he may have thought that it was too good to be true

And to his neighbors, God's plan certainly didn't make sense

But in the end, when he was able to put it all together, he knew beyond a shadow of
doubt that God's plan was best

Is it that any surprise – that God's plan is always best, even in *your* life?

He knows the end from the beginning (Is 46:9-10)

He never fails to accomplish his purpose (Is 46:11)

He's perfect in all his ways (Ps 18:30)

And *for those who love God all things work together for good* (Rom 8:28)

Conclusion

When God's plan . . .

Doesn't seem fair – take comfort in the fact that God knows/cares

Live for him no matter what

Seems too good to be true – don't rob God of the credit just because you're skeptical

Believe it and treasure it

Doesn't make sense – Trust that he's at work in ways you wouldn't believe if told

Because in the end, God's plan is always best

Close

Harmony of the Gospels (**slide**) – Resource Table

Building photos

Next Week – Luke 2:22-52