

When God Breaks In

Luke 1:8-25

1. Introduction.

- a. Luke is writing as a formal historian.
- b. We were introduced to Zacharias and Elizabeth—a priest and his barren wife.
 - i. To be barren was to be under shame. It was a sign of God's curse (cf. Deut. 7:11-13).
 - ii. This was a hopeless, and likely, confused couple.
 - iii. Yet in the midst of not understanding why God would allow them to experience seemingly unjust shame, they remained faithful. They were considered righteous in the sight of God.

2. The Priestly Service (8-10).

- a. The priesthood was reserved for those only of the line of Aaron, and they would perform God's ritual requirements on behalf of the nation.
- b. The Levitical priesthood was made up of 24 divisions after the 24 grandsons of Aaron. Abijah was the 8th. Twice a year, each division had to serve in the Temple for the period of one week. This is where the account of Zacharias picks up.
 - i. Aaron was chosen by lot to burn the incense.
 1. This would have been an enormous privilege. Very few priests ever received such an honor.
 2. The ritual itself was symbolic of the nation offering her prayers.
 - ii. The ritual required the priest to enter the Holy Place. It was very close to the Holy of Holies and would have been a fearful experience.

3. The Angelic Appearance (11-20).

- a. The angel appears to the right of the altar, signifying power and authority.
- b. Zacharias responds in fear.

- i. Luke tends to speak in understated terms, but this was a horrifying experience for Zacharias.
 - ii. His response is similar to most angelic appearances in Scripture—terror.
- c. The angel calms Zacharias with some typical opening words of an angel—“Do not be afraid...”
- d. We don’t know the content of Zacharias’ prayer
 - i. It could have been a prayer for the nation.
 - ii. It could have been a prayer for a son.
 - iii. However, the point is that he was a righteous man who made a faithful petition.
 - 1. In doing so, he sets into motion the climax of redemptive history.
 - 2. Again, this speaks to how God works through those who are small, weak, and of little nobility. Zacharias was a common priest of little significance.
- e. The angel makes the announcement of good news.
 - i. God is giving Zacharias a child.
 - ii. Picking up on language and themes from the Old Testament, the angel reveals this child will be the fulfilment of the prophesied forerunner (14-17).
- f. Zacharias responds in unbelief (18).
- g. God brings divine discipline in light of Zacharias’ unbelief (19-20).
 - i. This is such an important lesson for how God works—He makes Himself known through His Word.
 - ii. Our responsibility is to respond in belief.
 - iii. Yet sometimes God disciplines us in order to arouse our belief.

4. The Fulfillment (21-25).

- a. The people were anxiously waiting for Zacharias (21-23).
- b. The words of the angel come true (24).
 - i. We don't know why Elizabeth remained in seclusion.
 - ii. Some speculate it was because people would have thought she was crazy, so she waited until she was showing.
 - iii. Most likely, Luke is simply recording the events as accurately as possible. However, he doesn't always reveal the reason for why certain things took place.
- c. The believing response of Elizabeth (25).
 - i. In contrast to the unbelief of her husband, Elizabeth understands what God has done for her. God has taken away her shame; a symbolic statement of what God has done for us in Christ.
 - ii. Elizabeth understood God's favor and this was an act of grace. She doesn't respond with an attitude that she was deserving of this pregnancy.

5. Conclusion.

- a. The purpose of this account is to teach us how we should respond at the announcement of good news (i.e., the Gospel).
- b. Luke begins his writing by setting up the response of Zacharias as a foil for the reader.
- c. Luke is interested in our faith, and uses Zacharias as an illustration of what we ought not do—respond in unbelief to all he's about to reveal in his Gospel.

Small Group Question

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
2. Do you view your prayers as God's ordained means for accomplishing His purposes in this world? What ways might you manifest unbelief in your prayer life?
3. How do you evidence a true faith (i.e., trust) in the promises of God? In other words, list some specific promises in which you regularly remind yourself to trust.
4. Who can you pray for this week that needs the hope of the Gospel? Give a name. When do you plan to speak with them?