

01/12/25 - Luke 1:5-25 - "The Lord Has Remembered"

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Date: 12 January 2025

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verses 5 to 25. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah, and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as a priest before God, when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. And your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

[1 : 15] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

And Zechariah said to the angel, How shall I know this, for I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years? And the angel answered him, I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.

And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time. And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple.

And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.

[2 : 33] And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among people.

This is God's word. Today, in our text, marks a pivotal time in history for God's people.

For 400 years prior to the passage today, Israel had endured divine silence. No new prophets, no new revelations, just silence.

But that silence was ushered in by the words of Malachi. Malachi. In Malachi chapter 4, verse 5. Before that silence came, Malachi spoke. And what did he speak? He said, Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

[4 : 00] Then insert, four centuries of uncertainty. It must have left many of that day wondering, what in the world is God thinking?

400 years of radio silence? static? On the dial? And if we're honest, we ask the same question far often more than we like to admit.

As we see tragedies occur that we've been praying vehemently against. For situations not to resolve how they're resolving, right?

And it seems like prayers are going unanswered and radio silence. I can imagine Theophilus, the man who commissioned Luke to compile evidence, grappling with the same doubt, commissioning Luke.

And Luke undertakes this meticulous research and investigation so that Theophilus may have certainty concerning the things that he had been taught that we saw last week.

[5 : 23] In verse 4 and 5, Luke investigates and what he finds here is a remarkable story. A remarkable story.

One that takes place historically during the reign of Herod the Great who died somewhere around 4 B.C.

He really lived and he really died. placing that as a historical marker. And it's a story not only just of history but a story of an aging childless couple.

An aging childless couple. Zachariah and Elizabeth. They were righteous before the Lord. They were respected. They were both from priestly lineage.

They were the real deal. Yet, they bore the cultural stigma of barrenness. This couple would have thought, what in the world is God thinking?

[6 : 32] What in the world? I mean, even Zachariah's own name means the Lord has remembered. word. But by the time we conclude today, I think we'll realize that the real question isn't what is God thinking, but rather, what are we thinking to question God's ways?

And we will turn the script on ourselves. What we'll see today is sort of a reminder to not forget that the Lord always remembers.

Amen. The sermon title today is just that. The Lord remembers. The Lord has remembered. I'd like to pray before we go into the text today.

And if you are new with us and visiting here, welcome. And I would invite you to try out one of the few Bibles in any of the chairs. Flip over to Luke chapter 1.

and have your finger in the text as we go through. And I think that will be the most benefit to you for you to hear God's word and see God's word playing out.

[7 : 50] And let's pray as we dive into these two sections of the passage today. Father, help us to receive your word with open hearts, to receive encouragement with gladness, to receive rebuke with gentleness.

gentleness. Pray for your word to speak into our lives today, to transform us into the image of your beloved Son. Help us to see that today.

Help us to be challenged, encouraged, and whatever your word has for us today, may it be so. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, two sections today I think will be helpful to kind of unpack this.

And we'll be picking up in the first section here is an opportunity of a lifetime. After the characters have sort of been developed, it kind of takes over in these verses to follow.

And we see this opportunity begin during this era of silence and barrenness that history begins to shift. For Zachariah, this moment in history was a defining moment of his entire life.

[9 : 27] He was chosen to offer incense in the holy place, in the temple. Now, this might get lost from us.

We're like, well, that sounds cool. Isn't that what they always do? Well, yeah, but it's an opportunity that isn't always available to the same individual more than twice during their lifetime.

According to Yama 2, verse 5 through 6, of the Mishnah, offering incense in the holy place was not just something that they did.

It's not trivial like that. It's significant. He was chosen in what's known as like a name lottery, essentially, of the 24 divisions, and his was the division, the eighth division of Abijah.

And so, his name was put, casted forth among all these other names. It's like WKBN, rolling the ball and then choosing the winner, right? Who gets to offer the incense?

[10 : 30] And this doesn't happen often more than a lifetime. Usually, the people who don't get to offer that, haven't offered it before, get chosen first and get priority over the next rounds.

This was unique. This was something to praise God for. Could you imagine his excitement, right? I get excited about a full gas tank.

Amen. Amen. Let's be real. But could you imagine as he goes home and he runs like Charlie in Willy Wonka with the golden ticket.

He got chosen. I can't wait to tell Elizabeth. Right? And he goes and makes the recipe for incense that's all according to Exodus 30 with a specific recipe that if he screws up, he could die. No pressure. Right? Right? But the joy of this opportunity, but still this looming reverent fear. All the way leading to this day that arrives.

[11:43] Zacharias steps in through the temple, through the court of Gentiles, through the court of women, through the court of Israel, and into the court of priests, passing through the vast assembly of worshipers who are left behind in the court of Israel.

Each praying as verse 10 tells us, waiting for him in reverent silence, praying a multitude of people. And then the moment comes, the moment he's prepared for, the moment of excitement, he enters the holy place.

It's just him, alone. Can you hear the silence? The silence that has been reminiscent of 400 years walking into that temple.

I know this building, if you come here at midnight, get some weird, strange noises, it's that kind of silence. Reverent silence.

Imagine him walking in through, into the holy place. The holy place was just the corridor right before the holy of holies where God's presence is most concentrated and surrounded.

[13:07] He's surrounded by a splendor of embroidered cherubim on a rich scarlet blue and gold veil and he stands there before the altar.

To the left you have a table of showbread, to the right you have a golden lampstand, and before him is the golden altar of incense. incense. This incense is far from an air freshener.

This is a symbol of the prayers of God's people. It's a significance. It was a veil of reverence separating the high priest from the raw intensity of God's presence that was just ahead of him. any misstep in this preparation, yeah, could end in his very death. In verse 11, the silence is broken.

being in this isolated, lonely situation here in the creeks and everything, sensing the radio silence going on in this nation, oh, yeah, that would, it would take a mouse to freak me out, not to mention what he saw.

[14:51] And our modern imagination has kind of been dulled to cartoonish depictions of angels. I saw the young adults were talking about real depictions of angels up on my whiteboard, of baby cherubims, or maybe the gentle guardian angels of Clarence from It's a Wonderful Life, just fumbling his way around life trying to get his wings.

But biblical angels were nothing to joke about, terrifying. And they don't give you a trigger warning, friends.

What was the message? Your prayer has been heard. Your prayer has been heard.

Elizabeth will bear a son. His name will be John. He will be set apart, filled with the Holy Spirit, and will go forth in the Spirit and the power of Elijah preparing the people for the Lord.

At the mention of Elijah, Zechariah must have immediately recalled the words of Malachi. God's promise over 400 years is now being fulfilled.

[16:29] Real time, real people, real history. This was the turning point of history. The day of the Lord is near.

History turns on the hinge of God's faithfulness. And isn't it the silence that tests us, church? When we feel distant from God, when our prayers seem as if they're unanswered, it seems somehow, by that agony, our faith is refined.

For Zechariah, this day of service became the day of salvation. The ripple effect would reorient families and reignite hope for a displaced nation.

But as Luke writes, we realize a theological reality, that God's plan is of redemption, is not subjective, but His plan of redemption is objective.

[17:46] It is certain, historically objective, and recorded today for the purpose of our faith as well. So, faith isn't about understanding everything, about having the request lines open, and you sense that interaction, right?

No, faith is not about understanding everything, but it's actually trusting the One who understands it all, understanding the One who does.

trusting in it. For the unbeliever today, there is a reason recorded for you today, sitting here in Steel Valley Church or on the live stream, wherever you're at. It's finding you today.

It's a message from long ago that is reaching you and calling you to believe in something real, real history. And for believers, this message is recorded to continue to give us a reason to believe, a reason to hope, a reason to worship the one true God, a reason to sing. God is faithful, and history hinges upon His faithfulness. He is worthy, and this is good news. Amen. [19 : 08] But, verse 18, we see something change. And what we see appears to be unbelief of God's nation.

Zachariah is sort of that example. I was used as an example of bad behavior in classrooms when I was in high school. The teacher would use me discipline me as a sort of better watch out or else that's going to happen to you, right?

And what happens here is we see the overall problem of unbelief in this nation over the past 400 years, and arguably longer than that.

Verse 18, Zachariah said to the angel, how shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.

Zachariah doubted. The high priest doubted. He was not an atheist.

[20 : 35] He was a righteous priest. He knew of God's history of intervening, yet in that moment, unbelief overshadowed his faith.

How deep in apathy has Israel, this nation at large, have they fallen in apathy?

How deep is the apathy of this nation? Apathy is subtle. It certainly doesn't shout. It whispers. It numbs our soul.

Even in the face of divine revelation, revelation, we are prone to hesitate. Every Sunday, we come here, we open special revelation, and the week happens, and life happens, and we are still prone to doubt.

I can't be the only one here. And then the angel reveals his mighty identity. This is an angel to fear. [21 : 47] He says, I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place. because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time. There is no time to express doubt.

What God is doing in history is objective. It's historically sure. There's a reason to believe. For over 500 years, Gabriel had not made an appearance since he delivered a prophecy to Daniel of the coming Messiah in Daniel 9, and now he is returns, pronouncing the dawn of that day.

The day is here. What's this mean? The messianic age that Christ ushered in doesn't have any place for doubt.

[23 : 10] It demands faith. Demands faith. Imagine Zachariah's shame, the fear, reverent fear walking into the temple.

Still that wonder, an opportunity of a lifetime, and to leave struck mute. Actually, the word, if you did a little research on his condition, it can also mean mute and deaf, whatever have you.

It's like done talking, done listening, you heard the words, you need to think about it. It's like a strict parents. And he has the walk of shame as he exits this temple, unable to speak this customary blessing over the crowd, as it were for the last time incense was offered.

It was a big celebration as the high priest walked out. The people waited in anticipation, sensing something had happened, but can only receive gestures from him.

And you could probably, we could read other people's body language, you could probably tell something's wrong. No one would have expected this from Zachariah.

[24 : 33] Isn't that interesting? Interesting. But maybe we could see that a life of religious devotion means nothing unless it stems from the heart.

Zachariah's silence was both discipline, it was also grace. It was a forced season of reflection similar to Saul on the road to Damascus to shut up and think about your sin.

today I ask you to reflect on that as well in the quietness of your heart. Unbelief is no trivial matter.

Unbelief is serious. Unbelief is the unpardonable sin that paves the road to hell. Regardless of what your unbelieving friends say about hell, it is no party.

There will be no party in hell. It is eternal suffering, endless suffering. Everyone shaking their fist at God. And I think the irony of it all is that Zachariah's name, which means the Lord has remembered, was unable to remember the Lord.

[25 : 59] What a disciplinary action. Zachariah had so much to tell Elizabeth. So much to tell her. And was unable to do so.

I think men have an inherited problem of coming home from work and as their wives inquire about their day, we say, good.

Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Okay. Right?

Well, thanks. Great depth of conversation, right?

It's, I think, a problem of the fall. But, boy, he had so much he wanted to communicate after work that day. And it just excruciating that he wasn't able to.

The Lord remembered, but he was unable to remember the Lord. And unbeknownst to many today, this scene, as we continue through the gospel of Luke over the coming months, years, however long the Lord has for us, this is a melody that will continue to carry out.

[27 : 17] This very scene is a melody of unbelief that carries through this entire gospel. That those who seem closest to God are the ones who reject him.

And those who are far away from God are the ones that come running. Yeah, Luke is priming us. He's priming us to receive his gospel.

The words of our Lord Jesus in John 5 ought to hit us to the core about this. He says, Jesus Christ says, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

Hears and believes. He does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life. John 6, 28 and 29, they said to him, what must we do to be doing the works of God?

And Jesus answered, this is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent. Salvation church begins at the moment of belief.

[28 : 33] And our sanctification for that matter, if you're a Christian, is contingent upon your level of ongoing belief to continue to believe, to continue to remember in the promises of God.

And God's silence is often an opportunity, not for doubt. God's silence is an opportunity for reflection and surrender.

And so may today be the day of salvation for all of us here at Steel Valley. The passage concludes, after these days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden.

Saying, thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among people.

God's promises don't expire. They await their fulfillments. For Elizabeth, the dawn of the messianic age was first felt from a kick within her womb.

[29 : 59] A maternal miracle for this elderly lady. And just as God removed her barrenness, so too does he remove our barrenness of sin.

We're void of good works. We're void of anything righteous of our own. We are wretched, we are lost. God removed her barrenness and he removes our barrenness on behalf of our faith in Jesus Christ.

So how do you respond to the declaration that salvation has come? Not like Zachariah. God will I pray that we stand in wonder like the multitude outside of that temple with curiosity of what God has revealed.

I pray that we experience it personally as Elizabeth did, knowing that sometimes God silences us so that we can actually truly listen.

We're good at running our mouths and so slow to listen. God gave us a book of James for all of that. God bless you.

[31 : 22] And if this is your last sermon here, let this question linger in the silence of your heart. What will it take for you to believe in Jesus?

Believe in this historically credible message of salvation. May we never forget that the Lord always remembers us.

And if you're granted by the Lord's will to return next week for another sermon, I encourage you to return. For the Messiah is on His way. And for that, let's pray.