

Luke 1: 5 - 25 // Messenger of the Messiah

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[0:00] Today we're going to be in Luke chapter 1 verses 5 to 25. We're starting a very short little series on the coming of the Messiah, which will wrap up on December 24th.

And yeah, it should only be about an hour, of which I'm going to speak for about five minutes if that gives you any comfort. And there'll be much music, much song, much praise. Tyra will be back with kids too, which is pretty awesome.

She did a great job. Please make sure you congratulate her because that's like herding cats sometimes. I know that. That's pretty amazing. And may we all have the confidence of Cal, right?

Bold little king.

Love that. We celebrate the Christmas story and we embrace it as a beautiful time of year. And it is. If we look at it from a scriptural point of view, it comes at the tail end of 400 years of silence. No word from the prophets.

[1:03] 400 years. Not many of us can think 400 years back without looking at a family tree and trying to understand some things and asking around. 400 years of silence.

And the cry of a tiny babe would rip through the surface of time. And bring redemption. That's a lot of waiting. 400 years.

And if you're like me, you've had to get used to waiting in your life. And the waiting can be painful. Proverbs 13, 12 says, Hope deferred makes a heart grow sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. You know, there are many years where I only really ever saw the first part of that verse. I'm not sure I was ready to see that there was a tree of life waiting. Hope deferred makes the heart grow sick. And sometimes we can get in a place where hope seems so far off. Our prayer, our prayers, whatever we are praying for, tends to be every day, once a week, once in a while, until it just drops off.

[2:18] And you know, when I was preparing for this week, the Lord just told me to share openly again. And boy, it drives me nuts when he does that sometimes, because it's uncomfortable.

But I think we need to be real with one another and open, truthful, brave, courageous. That is the life that we have been called.

And sometimes that courage requires a long, long wait. Now, I have three kids, four in total now. And my daughter, who lives in Nebraska, we have always had a very close friendship. Similar personalities, so there were fireworks, sure.

But we've always had a deep and close friendship. So when she called me one day and said, Dad, I think I met the one. There was a part of me that was like, whew.

[3:21] I've been preparing for this day since I held her in my arm. One arm, you know, that small. And here someone came along and captured her heart.

I wish I could say that that turned out to be a good thing and with an honorable man. But that's not the way it was for Beth.

You'll know what I mean when you're a parent, when you pray for your kid who's going through hell. My daughter went through eight and a half years of a marriage that was riddled with physical, emotional, sexual abuse.

And it was heartbreaking. I have the training and the means to physically do something. And I tell you right now, I thought about it a lot. You hurt my little girl, I will hurt you.

That is the wrong heart to have. But as a father, how could I not be tempted by that? So I had to watch.

[4:31] I had to wait. I had to pray. And it seemed like years would go by and nothing would happen. Nothing would change.

I would see her, take her out, hold her, love her. Now she's 30. I'm still doing the same. And it's a heartbreak.

He left her. There was an affair. He initiated a divorce. And the custody battle has been brutal. And I'm walking through that with her day by day right now.

Phone calls, texts. And it's been a long, long wait. And I've wondered sometimes, Lord, are you in this?

I tell you right now, you know what I mean when it says it makes all the trivial things of life right down here. It brings you into perspective.

[5:30] And sometimes life will have a weight for us. And we wonder, God, where are you? But you see, I can't doubt and have a lack of faith in Beth's example.

Because through literally a tornado ripping off the roof of her house and sparing the lives of her two children and herself. Despite years of going through that, she comes out with a smile and with a greater faith than I know I have.

She comes out a stronger woman than I've ever known. And I know that's because of her relationship with Jesus Christ. And holding out for hope that he has a plan through all of this great, long wait.

So when I read that there's 400 years between Malachi and Matthew, I wonder what the people must have felt like in their tragedies, in their situations. God, where are you?

And maybe some of us are sitting here today with that same question on our heart. Where are you? Well, I hope that this passage will do for you what it did for me this week.

[6:38] And remind you to look up. Verses 5 to 7. 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. In the days of Herod. We can overlook that if we're not careful.

In the days of Herod means that this is something that really happened. It happened in a real time, in a real place, to real people. This is one of the things I love about the Bible.

It's a real thing that happened to real people, at a real time, in real places. This is a real story. And even though we're going to find out, and we're going to know, that Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child.

[7:48] At this point, that prayer was not yet answered. But it would come to pass very soon, that God would answer that prayer.

And oh, what a child that would be. To be a messenger for the Messiah. The coming King. To introduce Israel to Jesus. Wow. Verses 8 to 9.

It was a very rare thing for a priest to be chosen to do this.

Forgive the parallel, but this is like winning the lottery for a priest. This is just something that you could easily go throughout all of your duties as a priest and never experience. Yet here, on this day, this would be Zechariah's turn.

He must have wondered, Lord, why me? There must have been a sense of fear. You know, sometimes when we're called out to do something for God, and especially if we've been praying about it for a long, long time, and there hasn't been an answer.

[8:59] And suddenly the Lord says, okay, time to go. It happened like this for Moses. It happened like this for David. They were tending sheep.

And the Lord said, okay, let's go. It happened this way for Gideon, who was threshing wheat. It happened this way for Peter, the Apostle Peter and the boys, who were mending nets.

They were at their day-to-day just doing their thing. And the Lord came along and said, okay, it's time to go. There was a moment where it was right in the Lord. And they went.

And they went. According to the law of Moses, incense was to be offered to God on the golden altar every morning and every evening.

And there was a process. You'd walk with two other guys. There'd be the incense bearer. There'd be the person to do the sacrifice. The one to go and clean the temple and set the stage, right?

There was different roles that were people doing.

[9:55] And Zechariah was front and center. He would go and he would perform this duty. The smoke would rise up through the temple and out the vents of the temple. And the people who had gathered around for that morning sacrifice, it'd be like coming to church every day at 6 a.m.

And we have this morning prayer time. It was kind of like that. They did this before work. Smoke would go up and the incense would tell the people that the priest was praying for their nation, was praying for them as a people.

They would take encouragement from that. He would come out and he would give a prayer, but I'll get into that in a second. A lot of people would be waiting and praying and making their morning devotions.

For a guy like Zechariah, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Once-in-a-lifetime. Verse 10, and the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

There would be a deafening silence as the priest would come out. There would be this moment of just like, what's he going to say? Right? Is this a blessing? Is this a prayer of blessing?

[11:02] What is it? Shut up. You know, there would be this whole thing. This dynamic of, let's be quiet. Let's wait upon the Lord. But I believe that he would have thought about this prayer over and over and over again.

I'm sure he would have written it out. If it were me, I would have gone to other priests and said, what was it like? What did you do? What did you say? How long were you? Did you take too long?

Did you hurry? You know, like, I'd want to know all of that information. I don't know if he did that, but I wonder. I wonder if there was a curiosity there. But this is speculation on my point.

Because the role was to go and pray for the nation and to pray for the people. I don't believe, and this is, take this with a grain of salt. I don't believe he went in there and prayed for a child.

Maybe he would have thought that was self-serving for this role. Though, I think I would have been tempted to do it. We have no proof that he did or he did not.

[12:06] It could be that Zachariah was caught in this great long wait. And he started to feel that sense of giving up. Lord, when are you going to bring resolve to this?

Maybe, maybe, the wait was too long. Verse 11, and there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. I mean, we say that so casually, right?

I imagine him praying and just kind of opening his eyes and there's an angel there. In some translations, it'll say he was troubled. And I'm thinking, yeah, yeah, I'd be troubled. That would be a little shocking. That would get my attention.

I have to wonder what was running through his mind. Why didn't the other guys tell me about this? Does this happen all the time? I'm not sure. Verses 12 to 15. And Zachariah was troubled when he saw him.

He was surprised he saw an angel.

[13:25] No kidding. And the thing is, it wasn't like a fat baby with wings. Okay? We have to wrap our minds around that this is a warrior. This is Gabriel. One who stands with God.

This is big. Huge. But I'm not sure that Zachariah prayed for a child. I'm not sure. As tempting as that would have been.

Yet this is an incredible reminder that God hears our prayers. That this prayer was answered for him. One that I don't think he expected going into the temple that morning.

His prayer was answered. Now don't raise your hands. But ask yourself. Have you had a prayer that's been a long one? That is, as of yet, gone unanswered?

Those are not wasted words. That is not wasted time. God hears our prayers. He hears them. And even if the long stretch has been painful.

[14:29] And you've had to watch or endure pain through it. God hears those prayers. He does. This baby would be dedicated to God.

He would be filled with the Holy Spirit in the mother's womb. The baby would go on to be God's prophet. To present Jesus to the people of Israel. God would use John's ministry to turn many people, many hearts back to the Lord.

Whew. It was a long wait. What a blessed child. Verses 16 to 17. 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.

This is a reference back to Malachi which I had mentioned. Where in between Malachi and our New Testament. We have 400 years. Malachi 4 verses 5 to 6 says.

[15 : 35] Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet. Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children. And the hearts of the children to their fathers. Lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Even after centuries of waiting. A prayer. Of longing. For the Messiah. Now he has come. Now he is coming. Now the Lord sends a messenger.

Make way. Make straight your paths. For the Messiah is coming. Now is the time of your salvation. God has been silent to Israel for 400 years.

And God is here to speak again. Right here. Right now. Verses 18 to 20. And Zechariah said to the angel. How shall I know this?

For I am an old man and my wife has 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.

[16 : 38] 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. This was unbelief.

He said. How can I know this true? Can you prove it to me? Even after being a priest. Even after seeing God. I am sure answer many prayers. There was still this element of unbelief.

How could this possibly happen? And we get wrapped up sometimes. And fixated on how we think God doesn't love us. So when he goes to move.

And to answer a prayer. And to do something miraculous and incredible. Sometimes our reaction is. Come on. And yet that is unbelief. I don't think that it wasn't that he didn't want to believe.

But if we actually think of how big. How merciful. How loving God is. There's a part of us that want to reject it. Because it's just too good to be true. But God is good and true.

[17 : 45] Zechariah was questioning God's ability. To fulfill his own word. And I think this is a good time. For us to take a pulse of our own faith. Just to take a read.

Do we believe he's true? Do we believe he's coming again? Do we believe he is our captain and king? God could do anything.

And I love that he's so rich in mercy. That God didn't take away the promise from Zechariah. Even when he had unbelief.

And just because there may have been moments in our lives. Where we've looked at tragedy. Looked at difficulty. Looked at pain. Maybe we've experienced it ourselves. And just because we had faltering faith.

And just because there was a moment of doubt. It doesn't mean God will remove his promise from you. He didn't remove it from Zechariah. So today is a good day.

[18 : 47] To start praying again. For that thing you've given up on. Because God hasn't given up on you and me. If you're like me. You can probably make a shopping list of reasons why he should.

But he hasn't. No. God can do anything. God's promises are rooted in who he is.

And not who we are. Or what we have done. God's promises are rooted in who he is. Not in who you and I are. Oh praise God for that.

Verses 21 to 23. I'll be closing shortly after. 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. And when his time of service was ended. He went to his home.

[19 : 47] So the priest would come out of the temple. And there would be this morning devotional. And I think some people. I'm guessing at this. Were probably like. Okay buddy. Come on. I've got to go to work. Right? Let's go.

And he took a little while. And he comes out. And they're expecting. Excuse me. They're expecting this blessing. And he comes out. And he's like. He's doing all his charades.

Right? He's trying. He's like. You know. God spoke to me. He's trying. But he can't speak. He's going into it. They would expect the priest to come out. And give what's known as the erotic blessing.

This beautiful. Beautiful little piece of scripture. Number six. Verses 24 to 26. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you. And be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you. And give you peace. And yet Zechariah comes out. And he can't speak. He's been touched. To be mute. For a little while.

[20:43] He was acting out this story. Like charades. And I want to get into God's sense of humor. In a couple of minutes. But let me just. Read this first. Verses 24 to 25. And after these days.

His wife Elizabeth conceived. And for five months. She kept herself hidden. Saying thus. The Lord has done for me. And the days. When he looked on me. To take away my reproach. Among people. I want to jump down now. To verses 57 to 66. Now the time came for Elizabeth. To give birth. And she bore a son. And her neighbors. And relatives heard.

That the Lord had shown. Great mercy to her. And they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day. They came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him. Zechariah. After his father. But his mother answered.

No. He shall be called John. And they said to her. None of your relatives. Is called by this name. And they made signs. To his father. Inquiring. What he wanted him to be called. I have to stop there. Because this is a part of God's humor.

[21:39] He was only mute. He could still hear them. So it's like. They treated him. As though he was deaf. And mute. Right? Like you know. And he's probably thinking.

Like I can hear you. Can you talk to me. Like a normal human being. Right? And I wonder. I just can't help but imagine. If the angel Gabriel is going. There you go buddy.

Right? There was just this. I said to him. You can imagine that frustration. Then there he was. I took my kids out trick or treating. Years ago. My oldest son.

Took a cue for me. Because I was at a. A work costume party. And I'm not really one of those guys. So I just wrote a sign. My name is Earl. And I just hung it around my neck. And so he decided to go. For this Halloween. He just said. Hi. My name is Nick. And he. You know. Goes up to the door. You know. I've got a little princess. A little Batman. And my boy was Batman. My girl was princess. Just to be clear about that.

[22:35] And then Nick standing behind them. With this sign. And the woman looks at him. And says. Can you speak? And I'm just at the end of the driveway. Going. Like. You can't write this stuff.

It was just unbelievable. I imagine. Maybe. That's what Zachariah was feeling like. Really? And here's this moment. Anyway. Sorry. And he asked.

For a writing tablet. And wrote. His name is John. And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened. And his tongue loosed. And he spoke. Blessing God. And fear came upon all the neighbors.

And all these things. Were talked about. Through all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them. Laid them up. In their hearts. Saying. What then. Will this child be.

For the hand of the Lord. Was with him. It's beautiful. How God. Gave Zachariah. A second chance at faith. It's beautiful.

[23:36] How he gave them. That answered prayer. But it was a second chance of faith. That just. Sticks in my mind. Who here this morning. Needs a second chance at faith.

We've been struggling so long. In this long wait. Your belief is starting to crack a little. Not your belief in God. But just that sense that.

He can do anything. And you're struggling right now. Because you need to see it. And maybe that's you here. This morning. It is me. You know.

We were talking around Bible study. And I'll just say this. A mentor who was very influential to me. Another pastor. He said. You know as pastors. Our job.

Is to struggle. And he emphasized that word. To be one week ahead of everybody else. And that's just because of studying through the word. We are all. Disciples.

[24:37] Walking towards our captain and king. Jesus Christ. We are all. On this road together. We all have difficulty. We all have strife. I have it too. I came here this morning.

Feeling emotionally thin. A little spent. Because some situations are just like. You want to put your head through the wall. Sometimes. You know what I mean. And I came here feeling tired.

Because I'm also. In a wait. But then I read this this week. And I was reminded. Lord. I believe. But help me in my unbelief.

Father. You can do all things. By a word. You can create. The heavens and the earth. Lord. Give me peace today. And so my hope.

Is that we leave this place. With that second chance of faith. If yours is dented. If it's something. That you've never experienced before. If you don't know. Who Jesus is personally.

[25 : 35] You know. Romans 10. 9. Says it simply as this. No religion. No ceremony. Nothing attached to it. If you believe in your heart. And confess with your mouth. That Jesus is Lord. And rose again. You will be saved.

Say yes to that today. Say yes to the second chance. At faith today. Because God's arms are open wide. And he will not remove that promise.

Just because we've had a dented week. Let's pray.