

The Faithfulness of God

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- [0 : 00] Please turn with me this morning to Luke chapter 1. Before Glasgow City Pre-Church moved here, we were engaged in a study in Luke Acts.
- We had started a study before the dramatic events of St. Vincent Street, Ruthgate. So we're going to take up our studies of Luke Acts again.
- The series will take some years, and we're going to engage today with Luke 1, verses 57 through 66. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence.
- May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- God is faithful. God is faithful.
- [1 : 04] We live in a world of unfaithfulness. We live in a world of faithlessness in international politics, in national politics, in family relationships.
- Others would love to tell our children that they're never going to be hurt, betrayed, or let down by another person. But to tell them such a thing would be to spin a greater fantasy than any fairy tale.
- Others let us down. And we let others down. Others betray us. Others hurt us. And we betray others. Others hurt us.
- And we hurt others. That's the way it is in this world. Ultimately, only God is faithful. The God who will never let any one of us down.
- Who will never betray any one of us. Who will always be there when we need him the most. Now, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts is the story of God's faithfulness to himself, to his people, and to the world.
- [2 : 18] It provides us with somewhat a panoramic view of his faithfulness to ordinary people like us. The Gospel of Luke is first and foremost a testimony of God's faithfulness to us through the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ.
- I wonder, are there any here today who feel let down and hurt? Let me tell you, you will only ultimately find faithfulness in the God who sent his Son to live, die, and rise again for you.
- Well, in this passage, we see the faithfulness of God demonstrated in three ways. First of all, in the keeping of promise, verses 57 and 58. Then, in the mouth of praise, verses 59 through 64.
- And then third, in the service of a child, verses 65 and 66. So, first of all, we see the faithfulness of God in the keeping of promise.
- In the keeping of promise, verses 57 to 58. Now, you'll know the Gospel of Luke begins in a small village just outside the city of Jerusalem.
- [3 : 35] And it begins with an older couple called Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest in the temple, and Elizabeth was too old to bear children.
- And yet, through the mouth of the angel Gabriel, God had spoken to Zechariah and had promised the birth of a child to him and his wife. Now, they're ordinary people.

But God had promised to do something extraordinary in them, for them, and through them. Though physiologically, Elizabeth had gone beyond the years of childbearing, she is going to have a son.

Now, in our modern world, chemical and hormonal interventions allow women to have children into their late 50s or even 60s. But back then, there were no such interventions available.

And so, God's going to do something extraordinary in the lives of these ordinary people. Well, Elizabeth, six months through her pregnancy, when her young relative Mary comes to visit her, Mary stays for the latter months of Elizabeth's pregnancy, helping in whatever way she could, caring for her elderly relative in this extraordinary situation.

[4 : 56] And so, we reach verse 57. Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. The God who had made Zechariah a promise in verse 12, saying, Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son, now keeps his promise.

And soon enough, when the time comes for Elizabeth to give birth, she bears a son. The God who intervened in the ordinary lives of an ordinary couple from an ordinary village is faithful to all his promises to them.

Even this most unlikely, impossible promise, we might say. He did the same over a thousand years before when he made a promise to a woman who was well past childbearing age, say to the wife of Abraham, and she gave birth to a son, Isaac.

He did the same soon after, when even though she was barren, God made a promise to Hannah, the mother of Samuel, and in time, she bore a son.

God made these women the most unlikely of promises, and he was faithful to them all, right down to the finest detail of a baby's fingertips and a baby's eyelashes.

[6 : 19] The promise was made, the promise was kept. Now, I love the way in which the singing psalms version of the Psalter renders Psalm 145, verse 13.

This is something for all of us. Lucy, can you remember Psalm 145, verse 13? This is a great memory verse for you, right? For all of us. The Lord is faithful to his promises.

Psalm 145, verse 13. The Lord is faithful to his promises. Now, Zechariah and Elizabeth had hundreds of examples from which they could draw.

God's promises kept to their forefathers in their exodus from Egypt. God's promises in turning back the captivity of the Jews from Babylon. God's promises kept in his presence with them.

But now they had, in their own experience, experienced God's fulfillment of a promise made to them. And Elizabeth, in verse 57, bore a son.

[7 : 25] And yes, as we'll see next week as we move on to verses 67 to 80, even the son they were given was the fulfillment of a bigger promise.

He would prepare the way for the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The son Elizabeth would bear is going to preach a message of repentance and return.

He's going to point to the Messiah and say of him, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And so really here in Luke 1, 57 and 58, we've actually got a double fulfillment.

Not merely God keeping his promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth as an older couple. But his promise made from of old to his nation, Israel.

And so again we have the words of Psalm 145, 13 running through our minds. The Lord is faithful to his promises.

[8 : 28] There are not many words. You can remember these words this week. The Lord is faithful to his promises. Take this promise to the bank of faith and cash it in.

Whereas we live in a world which is characterized by unfaithfulness, unfaithlessness, God can be trusted to keep every promise he has ever made.

And you know the longer you go on in your faith in Jesus, the more precious this truth becomes. Because the older I get, the more I realize just how fickle, weak, and unreliable I am.

The less I can rely upon my own strength, ingenuity, and as Dolan McLeod said last week, gifts to see me through. And yet the older I get as a Christian, the more I realize how mighty, how faithful, how trustworthy God is.

and how I can rely upon his strength and wisdom to see me through. There's the nub of the matter. That is why the faithfulness of God and the keeping of promise is so important.

[9 : 41] If God cannot be trusted to keep his promises, we live in a dark and hopeless world indeed. We live in a world where every step stumbles and every dream is dashed.

But that's not the world in which we as Christians live. For though Zechariah and Elizabeth had hundreds of examples from which they could draw, we have thousands more than they ever dreamed of.

For we have seen the face of Jesus Christ, God's only son, promised to Abraham, fulfilled in our day. We have seen the cross of Jesus Christ, God's beloved son, promised to Isaiah, fulfilled in our day.

We have seen the resurrection of Jesus Christ, triumphant son of God, promised, yes, even in type through Jonah in the Old Testament and fulfilled in our day.

there may be some among us, maybe some of the older folk among us, who use as their daily reading guide the 19th century English preacher Charles Spurgeon's wonderful book, The Checkbook of the Bank of Faith.

[11 : 04] Sure, many of you will have heard of it, The Checkbook of the Bank of Faith. This description of the book from the Amazon website reads like this, A short reading for every day.

Spurgeon wrote the selection of readings to encourage believers to enter into the full provision that their relationship with Jesus entitles them on a daily basis. And then listen to this.

This is from the description of the book on Amazon.co.uk. Okay, you can go and check this one up. Checkbook of the Bank of Faith. Spurgeon explains that we have to present the promises of God in Scripture in prayer and faith, anticipating that he will honor what he has said.

Spurgeon explains that we have to present the promises of Scripture to God in prayer and faith, anticipating that he will honor what he has said. That's the lesson we learn from these verses.

The Lord is faithful to his promises. You'll find the promises he has for you in your written Bible or on your Bible app on your phone.

[12 : 15] These are the promises he makes to you and he will keep every one of them. They're not politicians' promises made to be broken as we only know so well. They're the promises of a God who has 100% track record of keeping them all.

However unlikely it may seem. I'm becoming aware that perhaps the greatest problem we face as a church is the problem of backsliding and walking away and becoming apathetic in our faith in Christ.

Maybe, maybe you're sitting there today. I've not been in this situation as your preacher. You're sitting there today and you've been walking away from God for many years.

Maybe not publicly but privately. You've prayed for years. The Bible's a closed book to you. Shall he ever have you back?

He has promised he shall have you back. Even more than that he will restore the fruitless years the locusts have eaten in your life.

[13 : 29] Or perhaps today you're racked with doubts and fears. You've got things going on in life and nasty letters from the doctor and from the tax man.

Shall God abandon you even as in your distress you are contemplating abandoning him? And he says I will never leave you.

I will never forsake you. Or perhaps perhaps you're exhausted today. Or you're not tired of serving Jesus but you're tired in the service of Jesus and you've got nothing left to give.

Shall your father in heaven leave you broken and over weary? No for he says come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

And then perhaps most powerfully in the context of Luke Acts shall God really keep his promises to Abraham that through one of Abraham's offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed?

[14 : 44] Shall the offspring of Abraham not just be for Jews but also for Gentiles? Shall the church which bears the name of Jesus Christ be composed only of ethnic Jews or shall it be composed of all who by faith are spiritual descendants of Abraham?

God shall keep even this promise. we see this continuing to be fulfilled in our own day as multitudes beyond number are flooding into the church from every nation people tribe on earth.

the Lord is faithful to his promises Psalm 145 13 if Lucy can remember it so can the rest of us made not just to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their barrenness not just to you and to me in our desperation but to the whole world and the coming of Jesus Christ look at the person sitting in front of you in church today it's not difficult to do they represent God's promise kept through the years although right now we are kind of close to capacity there will not be enough seats in this place to contain all those from Partick and from the city of Glasgow who the Lord will draw to faith in Jesus Secondly from verse 59 through 64 we have the faithfulness of God in the mouth of praise the faithfulness of God in the mouth of praise now these verses are deeply embedded in

Jewish culture and religion that is circumcision that is naming every Jewish child is to be circumcised on the eighth day as a mark of their being set apart for God and likewise they are named as used to happen in our own culture the name was usually given by the father and was taken from his own family line so my grandfather was William my father was William my big brother was William his son's William his son's wife is expecting a child I'm sure that child would be called William as well because that's the way things are done and that's the way things were done in the Jewish world of the day so the neighbours of Zechariah and Elizabeth thought that in order to preserve the integrity of the family line the child should be called Zechariah it's a good name it's his father's name after all it means the Lord remembered what's wrong with Zechariah well nothing unless the Lord had told you explicitly that the name of the child is to be something else and so in somewhat of a first in Jewish tradition it is the mother not the father it's Elizabeth not Zechariah who says he shall be called John now John was not a particularly uncommon name in the world of the day but it wasn't a part of

Elizabeth or Zechariah's heritage so you see here Elizabeth's faithfulness to God in her obedience to God's naming of the child even in the face of cultural opposition but remember because of Zechariah's unbelief earlier in the chapter he had been struck dumb he couldn't speak and so the people we read in verse 62 made signs to his father inquiring what he wanted the child to be called you know like children the people can't get round the mother so easily so they go to the father to try and twist them round their little finger but Zechariah having found a writing tablet writes his name is John now I'm going to take a little aside here for a moment and I want us all to listen very carefully to this we tend to think that the world of the day was largely oral in its transmission of information stories told from one generation to the next that people handed fact and truth down by way of the spoken word from generation to generation often that assumption is used to suggest that the life of

[19:12] Jesus though handed down orally wasn't recorded correctly by the gospel writers and that what you've got in your hands and this is a very prevalent view among many non-evangelical scholars what you have in your hands in the Bible are Chinese whispers they are legends of oral transmission gone wrong through generations but as archaeologists are increasingly proving the world of Jesus day was far more reliant on written tablets than previously thought people recorded important things on written tablets so they wouldn't get their facts mixed up so you went as a trader to a market you took a writing tablet with you to write down the transactions you had in the marketplace and archaeologists have dug many of these up in the

Middle East so there is no reason why the gospel writers Matthew Mark Luke and John would not have relied upon tablets they had written during the period of Jesus earthly ministry written records of what he said and did and this gives all of us here far especially young folk far more confidence that the four gospels we have in our possession are genuinely historical documents they are not myth they are not corrupted they are not legends they are carefully recorded events written down on tablets and later referred back to you a side over back on track God's closed Zechariah's mouth because he refused to believe the angels Gabriel's promise to him back in chapter 1 verses 18 through 20 Zechariah having been told at that point that God's going to do something amazing in his life his reaction should have been that of praise and worship but instead it had been one of unbelief and doubt and so

God closed his mouth up God shut him up so he couldn't speak a word but now in verse 63 having demonstrated that he really did believe God's word Zechariah's mouth is opened again and he does what he should have done in the first place he used his tongue to worship God the first words he spoke after nine months of being silent were words of wonder and thanks of praise and worship to the God who had given him such a faithful wife and such a wonderful son see how faithful a God we serve though Zechariah's mind and heart had been filled with confusion and uncertainty yet God demonstrated his faithfulness to this old man God persisted and persevered with

Zechariah until at length Zechariah believed the promises that God had made to him you know you can always tell a Christian who has experienced and understood the faithfulness of God's fulfilling promise you can tell them a mile away because he or she has a mouth which is open to praise him she's the first to start singing she's the last to stop singing and she's the one who has words not gossip or slander but words of glory for King Jesus she wants to tell others about how God has helped her he's going to share with others how God has changed his heart and replaced the confusion with confidence previously we might have been hurt by others and betrayed by those we thought we could trust but now we've discovered that

God really is the friend and our mouths are opened in praise of him who loved us and gave himself for us and you know that's a lesson to the early church to which Luke is writing rather than being annoyed at all these Gentiles who are believing in Christ and becoming members of the church they need to praise God for his gracious fulfillment of the promises that through Christ all the nations on the earth shall be blessed it's a lesson for us all here and let me tell you you will find faithfulness only in the God who sent his son to live die and rise again for you and when you experience that faithfulness for yourself you cannot but do what Zechariah did open his mouth in praise well lastly and very briefly the faithfulness of God in the service of a child verses 65 and 66 now one of the problems that we modern readers face is that although we might not know every detail we're reading we know what happens in the end right so we all know what happens in the end we know that

[24 : 47] Jesus is born and that having died on a cross Jesus is raised in the third day to new life we've seen the movie before we know how it ends but you come across verses 65 and 66 you've never read Matthew Mark or Luke sorry Matthew Mark or John so you know nothing about John the Baptist you know nothing about the remarkable ministry this child is going to have you're coming at it for the first time just like the friends and neighbours of Zechariah and Elizabeth and perhaps you might join with them in being a little bit unsettled in talking about their hearts perhaps you'd also be talking about this child with the strange name John this child upon whom the hand of the Lord clearly was what then would this child be they genuinely didn't know that this child John would go on to earn the nickname the

Baptist and he would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah they didn't know that he'd be the one who would point to Jesus and say behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world they didn't know that he would confront and challenge kings they didn't know that in the words of Jesus himself this child John was to be the greatest man in the history of the world all they knew was that this child came about in a rather strange way and that even his naming said and he yet there's something about all this which makes them realize what a special child he was that he's going to serve the Lord in a very unique way they didn't know much but they knew enough to understand that God was going to do something wonderful for them through this eight day old child John so these are what are called the

New Testament pregnant verses pregnant verses they are lines specifically designed to open us up to a new expectation of the work of God these verses in so few words say so much they're pregnant verses the greatest of promises are usually very short indeed so for example the greatest promises that we make are two words long we heard it yesterday up in driven I do I do and yet they comprehend a lifetime of service and self giving and sacrifice and these few short words in Luke 1 65 through 66 comprehend the life's work of the greatest of all the prophets greater than Isaiah Samuel or Jeremiah the man who would prepare the way for the coming of the king if we go back again and we look one with fresh eyes we're left wondering what does the future hold but then of course we can't go back and we look one with fresh eyes because we've already seen the whole movie we know how it ends we know who this child is going to go up into and yet you know there's an even stronger sense in which we're all in the same boat as these first readers tell me anyone here can anyone here predict what lies in the future for you you don't even know what tomorrow holds for you what anyone will do tomorrow or what anyone will be tomorrow we know nothing ourselves most of all we don't have a clue the future is very much an undiscovered country tomorrow is our pregnant future and the question is this who are you going to trust with your future

God has proved faithful to all his promises up until now he proved himself faithful to Elizabeth by giving her a son he proved himself faithful to Zechariah by opening the man's mouth can you trust yourself if you know yourself at all you'll have to say no I can't trust myself can you trust others they'll answer similarly even the best of us have a checkered history of promises kept and promises broken you the the only the only person with whom you can trust your future is the God who has never yet broken one of his promises and never ever will we live in a world of faithlessness but God is faithful and Luke is the record of his covenant faithfulness through all the ages to all his people and so again I ask you the question and answer that yourself rhetorical question who will you trust with your tomorrows will it be the

God who's got a hundred percent track record of love commitment and faithfulness ultimately demonstrated by the giving of his son to death on the cross for you or who else will it be let me close with this one promise of God that I know he fulfills and is always faithful to this one promise whoever comes to me Jesus said I will never turn away whoever comes to me I will never turn away that's his promise Jesus Christ has a one hundred percent track record as demonstrated in Luke chapter one of keeping his promises and he'll deliver on this one too that if any one of us whatever our past whatever our present whatever our doubts whatever our uncertainties whatever our fears whatever our distresses if any one of us today should turn to Jesus

[31 : 16] Christ in faith he will not turn you away in this world of faithlessness we cannot trust anything but you can trust the promises of God you can trust him so why don't you come and test out his faithfulness for yourself today let us pray Lord we thank you for your word we thank you for the power of your faithfulness that faithfulness which had broken power from before the universe began for we know that even our believing in you is according to the promise that you made before this world came into being the father we pray today that your holy spirit would open our hearts to our great need of Jesus Christ as our savior and lord there are many of us here oh lord who have not yet opened our hearts to you many think that we're able to keep on going by ourselves but lord give us a view of tomorrow and the uncertainty of what will be tomorrow give us a view of how you are the only person in the whole never mind universe you're the only person in existence who can be trusted always to be faithful in

Jesus name we pray these things amen to do to y god you