

The Christian's Father

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, and happy Father's Day to all those fathers.

! I just wanted to clarify, my wife is not here this morning. We are good. She's picking up a group. We have a mission team that's coming in this morning, so she is not with us this morning. On December 7th, 1988, an earthquake devastated the northwestern section of Armenia, killing an estimated 25,000 people. In one small town, just after the earthquake, a father rushed to his son's school, only to find that the school had been flattened.

There was no sign of life, but he had no thought of turning back. He had often told his son, no matter what, I'll always be there for you when you need me. Those prospects appeared hopeless.

The father began feverishly removing rubble from where he believed his son's classroom had been. Other forlorn parents only wailed helplessly. My son, my daughter. Some told the father to go home, but there was no chance that any of the children would be alive. Yet he replied, I made my son a promise. I'd be there for him any time he needed me. I must continue to dig.

Courageously, he worked alone. No one volunteered to help him. He simply had to know for himself. Is my boy alive or is he dead? Finding strength and endurance beyond himself, the faithful, loving father continued to dig. For eight hours, 12, 24, 36 hours.

[2 : 01] Then, in the 38th hour, as he heaved away a heavy piece of rubble, he heard voices. Armand, he screamed. A child's voice responded, Dad, it's me, Armand.

Then I told the other kids not to worry. As Armand told those kids, he said, I told them that if you were alive, you'd save me. And when you saved me, they'd be saved. You promised you would always be there for me. You did it, Dad. Moments later, the dad was helping his son, Armand, and 13 more frightened, hungry, and thirsty boys and girls climb out of the debris, free at last. When the building collapsed, these children had been spared in a tent-like pocket. When the townspeople praised Armand's dad, his explanation was, I promise my son, no matter what, I'll be there for you.

Now, I hope you like this story. I love this story because it's a great example to really show us how God the Father is there for us. This is Father's Day, and as a father, I'm honored to be preaching this morning. But to be honest, I need to tell you that truly, I don't really feel worthy to be up here, but by God's grace. As I look back on these past few months and the things that happened in my world with my kids, some would even say that I fail as a father. But again, by God's grace, I can stand here and claim God's promises. He's faithful, and whether you're a father or mother or anyone here, I trust that as I go through this morning that you'll understand that we have a father in heaven that really loves us, and he's there for us. Now, my main point this morning is that we have, as a Christian, we have the Christian's father. This morning, I'd like to look at the account of Zechariah. It's found in Luke chapter 1. If you have a Bible, please turn there. We'll read that here in just a few moments. But Zechariah was John the Baptist's father. He was a faithful servant.

There's some examples that we'll look at in his life that I trust are helpful and will guide us as we go through this day and as we look at God our Father. We have a Father who loves us and cares for us. Our Heavenly Father cares for us and is concerned for our lives. Through this account, Zechariah, the message will be broken down into three different points. The first, we'll see that he was obedient. Our second point is how Zechariah was a man of prayer, and the third point is that he trusted God's Word. If God is our Father and we believe that He is who He is, we should obey His words.

If God is our Father, we should have confidence in our relationship with Him, and we should be in communion with Him through prayer. If God is our Father, we should know that His Word is truth and what it says is true as well. So we'll read verses 5 through 17 in Luke chapter 1.

[5 : 14] We'll begin in verse 5. 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, 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 to their children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before them 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. Let's pray.

Father God, as we come before you this morning, we are grateful for you as God the Father. We're grateful for all that you've done, sending your son to this world to live a perfect life, to die on the cross for our sins, to be an example, and to give us hope. Lord, as we go through this morning and the sermon, may your words flow from my mouth, not my words. Lord, may we have attentive hearts and ears, and may your word go forth boldly. Lord, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[7 : 44] I don't know if they still use this phrase or not. Maybe some of us have heard the phrase, he came from good stock. That phrase, it's a euphemism for people that typically have good genetics, they're good characteristics of who they are. It's a term which originated primarily around farming, and it signifies kind of the characteristics of an animal. Now, I have a cousin who is a farmer, and they have registered cows. So as a registered cow, those things have to be traced. They have to trace their lineage from the birth of the bull and the cow, just so that it all is documented, and so that someone who would possibly look to buy one of those animals would see that it had come from good lineage, from good characteristics, that the people that were looking at that would see that it had, you know, good size structure, good girth, and other things that cows have. I don't know a lot about what a cow looks like, but from my cousins, they have told me those things. So that the characteristics and the characteristics of a cow would have what people are looking for when they're looking to buy an animal. Well, as I say, I don't know a lot about the characteristics of the cow, but we can see really what Zechariah's lineage was here. He had been from the lineage of one of the tribes, which, as we see here, was part of the tribe that was serving of Abijah. They were the group that was serving at this time when this verse and this chapter was presented. But we can also see the lineage of his wife, Elizabeth, where she was of the lineage and a tribe of Aaron. Now, that is the things that we can know, we can understand, but we also see some other things that are characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Not only did they have a good heritage, but they were both righteous before God. Listen to what verse 6 says, and they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. Now, I'm not sure about you, but that phrase that says, blameless in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord, sometimes I've had a misperception of that. The misperception is that blamelessly, in our eyes, is that they were perfect.

Well, I don't believe that Zechariah and Elizabeth were perfect, and neither are we. But I do believe that they had awareness, and they were in tuned to everything that they were able to do in terms of keeping the law. They obeyed what it said. In other words, they were faithful in keeping the ceremonial law of the Israelites. We see this in what they did in keeping with the rights and customs of what God had ordained for the children of Israel. And we can really surmise as well that it was not only something outward, but it was an internal posture as well. Not only did their outward actions show that they were blameless, but internally, we can also surmise that they really loved God and that that showed in what they were doing. So in that day, and even in our day, someone that is called righteous before God and blameless, there has to be a character assessment. We do this all the time, right? Even today, we watch and observe people and see how they act and listen to what they say. We kind of size them up and judge them and look at their character. Well, in their character assessment, people would say that they were individuals that walked upright before the Lord. People could look at their lives and see that they walked upright. And even though imperfect, they lived out their lives that were righteous. In other words, they walked their talk. They fulfilled their duties before men.

They lived their lives that stood out. And we can see that they were obedient to God and in faithful service. And specifically, we can see the faithful service of Zechariah. Now, the duties of a priest, they're not something that you just automatically show up and one day perform. As we know, and as you look through scripture, there's order, there's process in all the duties that they were required to do as they performed those in the temple. God had set out that order and had given instructions to Moses and Aaron years ago on what would happen in the temple. Zechariah, he'd been trained in those duties, was very obedient in that. And we see here that there were also some special things that priests were called to do. And one of those things is the burning of incense. From what I've read about the burning of incense, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Zechariah. Now, we can only imagine what this might have been like for young people and for a lot of us that have experienced Christmas.

You know, the excitement of that, just the experience of the Christmas Eve and anticipation of what that would be like. Zechariah's faithfulness in his service in the temple and to the children of Israel was blessed because he was chosen by lot to perform this duty. His faithfulness of his prayer life was brought forth in that day as well. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a son, but God had not granted that prayer. They had faithfully prayed for that for many years, and they were both advanced in years though. So verse 7 says, but they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now, this indicates that he was obedient and faithful in his prayers as well because God is God, and we should obey him with our prayer lives.

Now, God isn't like Santa Claus, of course, where we get everything we ask for, but Zechariah's obedience, we see God does answer his prayer. Verse 13 can confirm that as we see God answered with his interaction with the angel. Here we see that the angel says, 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. Zechariah's faithfulness and obedience can be seen in what we can observe in really what he was called to name the baby. The angel told Zechariah that his name shall be John. The Hebrew meaning for John is Jehovah's gracious. This name and announcement can be seen in the outpouring of grace to Zechariah and Elizabeth, a couple that was advanced in years and at this stage of their life possibly had, you know, really no hope. But the blessing of the son was seen and observed. Jesus pronounced that, and it was also a way that

[15 : 16] Jesus' announcement as well would be pronounced of the coming Messiah. Now, I don't know about you, but as they even understood what the angel was saying at that time, but as they look back, and as we look back in Scripture, we can see the power and impact that John had in the life of the church, what grace God poured out on Zechariah and Elizabeth in this. The fulfillment of that, of Zechariah's obedience, we can see that as he fulfilled and said, wrote down on the tablet, that his name is John. In our chapter, down in verses 63 and 64, the faithfulness of Zechariah came to fulfillment when he wrote John's name on that tablet. We see that Zechariah's mouth was open.

Verse 64 says, and immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke, blessed God. It's amazing to me that he recognized and obeyed God and spoke through the angel.

He blessed God. Now, we see in the account of Zechariah that he obeyed God, which helps us to understand that we should obey God even today. Next, we'll look at Zechariah and how the command of God and the command as we are to commune with God, and we should be obedient in that and be communing with him by being people of prayer. This day in Scripture, we see Zechariah going in to burn incense.

As I mentioned, it was a special day. It was a special day for many reasons. First of all, it's typically a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and as I did some study and looked back at that time, my understanding is that there were about 20,000 priests that were available and were serving.

So to be chosen, the one to go in and burn incense, again, that was a very pretty special deal. The incense offering, there's some symbolization with that as well for the individual and for corporate prayers of the people. This offering, it took three people. There was one priest that went in and removed the ashes from the previous offering. There was the second priest that would go in, and he would carry in the ashes and would place them on the golden altar, and then he would leave.

[17 : 51] The third priest, he was the one that brought in the incense. As I mentioned, Zechariah had this honor where he was to sprinkle the incense on the burning coals. When you sprinkled the incense on the burning coals, the smoke ascended, and then from that time, then Zechariah would offer intercessory prayers.

He would offer intercessory prayers for the people. With those prayers, we can see that he also offered prayers for a son. Now, when he went into the holy place, John Calvin had a great statement that I thought was helpful in his commentary for us. He says, whenever the priest entered into the holy place, he went in, as it were, into the presence of God, that he might be a mediator between him and the people. This is a time when Zechariah came into God's presence and poured out his heart on the people's behalf. And as I mentioned, we see from the text as well that he was able to express his own heart and the desire to have a child. One of the blessings we have today is that we don't have to go into the holy place, but we're able to bring our prayers before the throne at any time.

We can pray in our car, we can pray on the bus, when you get up, when you go to bed. It's encouragement as we read through Hebrews that we can see this and it really helps us to understand this as the writer brings out that over and over, how through the new covenant, Jesus is our great high priest, and we can boldly approach the throne and bring our prayers before him at any time. As I mentioned, there's a lot of symbolism in the offering of the incense, and another resource that I saw, John Owen, in his commentary on Hebrews can kind of help us maybe to understand some of these symbolism and help us in our prayers as well. In that commentary, he mentioned that incense is like prayer. One way that he mentioned that is in the first way, incense is usually beaten, which helps us to understand that when we come to God in prayer, that we should come with broken and contrite hearts. The second is that incense, when it is burned, rises towards heaven, which helps us to understand that our prayers rise toward the throne of God.

John Owen states that the third way that incense is like prayer is that it needs fire, which as he says is a representative of the Holy Spirit, which should be our source and power when we pray.

The fourth way, he said, was that incense sends up a sweet aroma, which is what our prayer should be to the Lord. What a joy and privilege it is really for us to pray to the Father of heaven because he hears our prayers. We can bring our personal and intimate prayers to the creator of the universe. What an amazing blessing. Not only should we be individuals of prayer who pray, but we should have unity in prayer as well. We see in verse 10 that the children of Israel were also praying along with Zechariah, which was a custom during that time. Verse 10 reads that, And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

[21 : 19] So while Zechariah was praying for the people, those that were in the outer courts were praying as well. Now, the text is not clear if it was a time of festival, but that was a custom when incense was offered twice a day. During that time, people might be praying. There were people, as we see in this text, praying in the outer courts. But we probably would assume as well that there were other people outside the courts that were praying. You know, we were challenged and see in scripture that there's many pious people, and they would be praying, offering prayers out of habit. But we could probably understand as well that there were people that came with broken and contrite hearts and were pouring out their hearts to the Lord. The people prayed along with the priests' prayers.

They brought unity of their prayers together. Now, for us as a church, unity of our prayers can be done through our corporate prayer. Pastor Moss has encouraged us to join here at the church for our corporate prayer on the first Monday of the month, if you're able. But not everybody is able, and we understand that. There's other commitments and things, circumstances that you're not able to come out.

But as we think about people of unity in prayer, if God is our Father, we should be people that commune with Him in prayer. And let me encourage you to join with those that are praying here on that Monday, to join with us in prayer, those that are here, that we might have unity in our prayers.

Peter encourages us in a verse in 1 Peter 3.8, which says, Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

So let's be purposeful about this and pray in unity when we have our corporate prayer meeting on the first Monday of the month. If I might add another word of encouragement about prayer, we see that Zachariah and Elizabeth had been praying for a child for many years. We can hear their circumstance, verse 7, but they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

[23 : 33] But what we can gather from this, that Zachariah and Elizabeth had been praying for a child for many years. Those prayers have probably been done in private, and I'm sure had been prayed over and over again and again. But the encouragement is that God answers prayers. So just because you've prayed for something for many years, don't discount God, because He hears our prayers, and He answers our prayers. Just like we see here in this count, God is a God who answers prayers, but they're for His purposes, not ours. Continue to pray. Lift up your petitions to God.

And if it's according to His will, He will answer them. He will answer them in His time. Continue to be faithful in prayer, just like Zachariah, and let God be God. Know that we can bring our prayers to Him, because He is our Father. Because God is our Father, we should be obedient to Him, and we should be people of prayer. Lastly, God is our Father because we can trust His Word.

Now, we all, I believe, would say that the Bible is God's Word and trust that. But throughout the pages of this book, we can see over and over the many promises and prophecies that have come true.

From the prophecies that were fulfilled in the Old Testament to the promise of the Messiah, God's promises have come true over and over again. That should give us confidence to trust God's Word.

A couple of different sources that I looked at said that there are over 365 prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled by Jesus. Right here, we can see just one of those prophecies fulfilled through Zachariah in the birth and ministry of John the Baptist. You recall a verse in Isaiah 40, many of you probably know this verse, where Isaiah prophesies, the verse reads, A voice cries in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. And now we see this fulfillment in John the Baptist, where John the Baptist, in his words himself in John 1.23 says, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

[25 : 59] Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. It's also interesting that, you know, God had not spoken to the children of Israel for over 400 years before Jesus, but he had not forgotten Israel or the promises of the Messiah. If we listen to what the angel says to Zechariah in verses 16 and 17 of our chapter, the angel is speaking to John, about John the Baptist. So listen to these words. Verse 16 says, And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

Here again, and we can see and trust in God's word because of the promises that he promised. Malachi 4, 400 years earlier, wrote about John the Baptist.

If you would just turn over your Bibles to the last chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi. Malachi, we'll look at chapter 3, 1 verse there. Keep your finger back in our passage.

Here's a proof test again to show that God's word is true and we can trust it. Malachi 3, 1, the first phrase reads, Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

And this verse speaks about John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. You know, though John the Baptist had followers and he had disciples, and many of those disciples were then Jesus' followers.

- [27 : 49] So he was preparing disciples for Jesus as well. It's quite amazing as we see that. Now, we see the promises and prophecies of the Bible being fulfilled in the Messiah, but ultimately we can trust God's word because of the promise of salvation.
- And Jesus fulfills that. One of the priestly duties was to offer sacrifices. Sacrifices for sins, which for the Israelites, that basically just covered over those sins.
- And the sacrifice of Jesus has many different facets. But the one that amazes me is the picture that is so striking of the animal that was sacrificed.
- The animal that was supposed to be sacrificed we see in Exodus 12, 5, which tells us that it is to be a lamb without blemish, a male a year old.
- And you can take it from the sheep or the goats. Again, this is a picture for the Israelites for us today, to see that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice to take our place. The fulfillment and how we understand that is found in Hebrews 9, 14.
- [28 : 58] Hebrews 9, 14 reads, How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.
- Quite amazing, isn't that? The prophecy was that Jesus was to be lifted up and everyone who looks on him will live.
- Another kind of a proof text in the Old Testament, Numbers 21 gives us the account of the children of Israel, where they were complaining and were discontent with God for bringing them into the wilderness.
- If you remember that story, God brought those fiery snakes to bite and kill some of them. Now, Moses was instructed to make a serpent and put it on a pole and put it where the people could see it, where, if you remember, the people, if they looked at it, if they were bitten by the snake, they would live.
- Listen to John 3. John 3, 14 reads, And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.
- [30 : 11] But whoever believes in him will have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- So we can trust God's word because of the prophecy of the angel who told Zechariah to call his name John. When Zechariah wrote on that tablet that his name shall be John, God followed through and opened Zechariah's mouth.
- And Zechariah praised God. We can trust in God's word because of all the prophecies that are fulfilled in Scripture and ultimately the prophecy of the Messiah being promised and his work being fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus.
- Jesus took our place to bring us to salvation. If we believe in the work of the cross, God's word is truth. We can believe every word that is in it.
- Zechariah is a great example for us. As we look at him as the father of John the Baptist, we see the example of Zechariah lived out in his obedience to God. Through his faithful service.
- [31 : 17] As we obey God, we should be obedient to him. Through what we do every day, every minute in our work, in our play, how we live our lives.
- Can others see that we are righteous and live lives that are honoring to God? Our obedience should be seen by others, just like Zechariah.
- We trust that they would say, just like they said about Zechariah in verse 6, And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

Now, if God is our father, we should exemplify Zechariah in our communion with God as well through prayer. We should be pouring out our hearts to God. And just like Zechariah, we should see his long-suffering prayer.

And even when the prayer was not answered, we should not stop praying, but be continuing in prayer as God leads. We should pray in unity as well, just like we see the children of Israel praying in unity.

[32 : 21] With Zechariah, when he went in to offer his prayers for the people, when he prayed at the hour of incense. Pray knowing that God answers, and that he would shape our prayers to be in his will and be answered in his time.

God's word should guide our lives, if God is our father, because we can trust his word. Over and over, prophecy after prophecy was fulfilled, with the ultimate prophecy of the Messiah coming to this earth as a man, living a sinless and perfect life where he could take our place.

Let me encourage you, if you don't understand that, what the Messiah is, or the sacrifice of Jesus, that you would find someone, find an adult. Talk to me, talk to Pastor Moss.

We can explain that in more detail. The promises are true, and the judgments that are in the Bible are true as well, because God's word can be trusted.

Do you remember that little boy Armand, and what he said to the other children when he heard his father's voice? He told those other children, I told those kids not to worry.

[33 : 34] I told them that if you were alive, you'd save me, and when you save me, they'd be saved. You promised you would always be there for me. Is God your father this morning?

If you've accepted him as your personal savior, God will be there for you. If God is your father, he will be there.

So knowing that he is there and that Jesus died for you should give you the desire to be obedient to what the Bible says. God is there for you, and because of that, he is willing and open to hear your prayers.

God is there for you, which also gives us the confidence that we can trust God's word, and that should guide our lives. If God is your father, live your life in a way that exemplifies that.

Heed God's word. Communion with your father and trust his word. He's there for you. Let's pray. Father God, we do come before you thanking you for your word, thanking you for the truth that is in it, the truth that is true.

[34 : 55] Lord, we thank you for the truth of the Messiah that came and the promise that was fulfilled through the person of Jesus, through your life, through your death, and through your resurrection.

God, we pray that if there is someone here that does not understand, that they would come to that understanding today, that they would accept you as their personal Savior. Jesus, Father, we thank you for being our father, for being there for us, that we can trust your word, that we can commune with you in prayer, and that we can be obedient to you, and that should drive us to be obedient because of the truth of your word.

Work in hearts this morning, Lord, and we thank you for your word. May it be powerful. May what has come out of my mouth, people would have heard as coming from you.

Lord, we thank you for all that you've done for us, and we do ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.