

Series: Luke 2024

Title: Two Questions, Two Hearts

Text: Luke 1: 18-25

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Zacharias was in the temple praying. The angel Gabriele appears. He tells Zacharias that Elizabeth would bear him a son.

Luke 1: 18: And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. 19: And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. 20: And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. 21: And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. 22: And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. 23: And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. 24: And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, 25: Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

Subject: Two Questions, Two Hearts

Zacharias was overcome with the most awful hideous of sins: unbelief. After all the good news the angel declared to him, Zacharius asked, “*Whereby shall I know this?*” The angel spoke the words, that is how he should know it. Whereby shall we know that the good news declared in this book is true? God said it, that’s how! It is the word of God. But Zacharias did not believe the angel’s words.

Mary asked what appears to be the same question in verse 34, “*Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*” Yet, her question was from a heart of faith.

Only the Lord sees the heart. He looks on the heart. The Lord heard these two questions. And the Lord looked on both hearts. He saw unbelief in Zacharias heart but faith in Mary’s heart. We will say more about that in a moment.

Zacharias wanted a sign *before* he would believe. Therefore the angel gave him one, Gabriel said “*Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.* Zacharias was made deaf too, verse 62 says, “*And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.*” For at least 9 months, Zacharias was deaf and dumb due to his unbelief.

Oh, what grace and mercy from God! If we really understood how vile unbelief is toward God then we would understand what grace and mercy God showed Zacharias, to only make him dumb and deaf, and that for only around nine months.

Proposition: Since the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, as the Head of his elect, served God our Father in perfect faith—since our Substitute justified each sinner for whom he died, since he put away all the sin of his people by his one offering, including the sin of unbelief, since he is our Advocate with the Father at God’s right hand, our Lord shall give each one faith and continually renew our faith day-by-day. He shall save each of his people from the sin of unbelief.

UNBELIEF CALLS GOD A LIAR

Why is unbelief an offense to God? Unbelief calls God a liar.

1 John 5: 10: He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 11: And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

This the record of God, the witness God has given. God has given us his word. He has given us the same covenant promise he gave Abraham. Our Lord even confirmed his promise to Abraham with an oath. He could swear by no greater so he sware by himself: two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie. He has given us the same covenant promise. This is the record of God to you who God has given the Holy Spirit.

1 John 5: 11:...that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12: He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

We believe because God has given us the Spirit who bears witness of God’s record in our hearts.

1 John 5: 10: He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.

But those who believe not call God a liar.

1 John 5: 10...he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

What could be more offensive? If you father or mother showed nothing but love to your child all their life, you fulfilled every word you spoke to your child, then your child says to you, “I don’t believe you. Give me a sign. Prove to me you are telling me the truth.” Would that not grieve you to your heart?

Hebrews 3: 15: While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. 16: For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17: But with whom was he grieved forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18: And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19: So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Unbelief is an offense to God because it calls God a liar.

ALL BELIEVERS HAVE UNBELIEF

No believer is immune to unbelief. As long as God's saints have a sin-nature, unbelief will give us trouble.

Zacharias was chosen by God's grace and blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, like all God's elect. Christ was his Surety in whom he was righteous and holy, blameless in the sight of God, as all God's saints are. The Lord gave Zacharias faith and made him a man devoted to God. God made him a priest. He was interceding between God and his brethren at this very time. Zacharias had God-given faith to behold Christ foreshadowed in his office, as well as all the ordinances.

Also, he was an aged believer. He had read of all God's promises in the scriptures and he had proven God's faithfulness many times over by now. Do you see how blessed of God Zacharias was?

When the angel of the Lord appeared to him, verse 12, says, "Zacharias saw him." He saw the angel with his own eyes. The angel of the Lord startled him. Then he heard the angel speak. The angel said to him in verse 13, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

The angel did not speak in maybes. He spake certainty in verse 14, "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. 15: For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall [be a Nazarite devoted to God]; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. 16: And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17: And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

But even a perfect messenger speaking dogmatically of God's sure promises cannot make a person believe. A perfect messenger with a perfect message cannot keep us from unbelief unless God in power bless it to our hearts. This chosen, redeemed, sanctified, faithful, aged, priest of God, verse 18, "*...said unto the angel, Whereby*

shall I know this?” What sign will you give me so I know you are telling me the truth so I can believe you?

Brethren, no believer is immune to unbelief, not even one as blessed of God as Zacharias. No matter how God has blessed us, so long as we have this sinful flesh we will have a problem with unbelief. We have to cry like our brother, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mr 9: 24).

FAITH IS NOT CARNAL REASON

Carnal reason darkens faith. When we consider our inability, our natural reason fills us with unbelief. Our inability makes reason forget God’s ability.

The reason Zacharias gave for asking for a sign was, verse 18: “...*for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.*” Zacharias looked to himself. He saw his inability. He saw Elizabeth’s inability. So his carnal reason said this is impossible. He did not believe in God’s ability. Our natural reason, our carnal sight, produces unbelief. Only God’s revelation in the heart produces faith.

Unbelief reasons, “*I am an old man.*” The faithful angel of God answered verse 19: “...*I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.*” In those two statements, look at the difference in unbelief and faith.

Faith says I stand in the presence of God all-powerful: I stand before God with whom nothing is impossible, I stand before God who does as he will in heaven, earth and hell and none can stay his hand or say unto him what doest thou.

The faith that God gives believes God is able.

Matthew 9: 28...blind men came to [our Savior]: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. 29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. 30 And their eyes were opened;...

Hebrews 11: 17: By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, 18: Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 19: Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Do you believe the Son of God was able to take flesh like unto his brethren? Do you believe he was able to finish the transgression? and to make an end of sins? Do you believe he was able to make reconciliation for iniquity? Do you believe he was able to bring in everlasting righteousness? Do you believe he was able to fulfill the law and the prophets? Do you believe he was able to enter into the holiest of holies

having obtained eternal redemption for his people? Do you believe he accomplished all these things? That is the word of the Lord that this same angel, Gabriel, delivered to Daniel (Dan 9:24). By God's grace and power, Daniel believed the word delivered to him. He believed Christ is able to do all that he promised.

UNBELIEF AND FAITH ARE MATTERS OF THE HEART

Unbelief is a heart matter the same as faith is a heart matter. God looks on the motive of the heart. I titled this message "Two Questions, Two Hearts." Let me show you why.

Luke 1: 18: And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this?

Whereby shall I know you are telling me the truth so I can believe; this was unbelief; Gabriel said, *verse 20, "And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."*

Almost identical to this, six months later, Gabriel comes to Mary.

Luke 1: 26: And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27: To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28: And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed *art* thou among women. 29: And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. 30: And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. 31: And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32: He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. 34: Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

Mary's question was almost identical to Zacharias as far as we can tell. But God looks on the heart. Mary believed the word delivered to her. Mary believed God is able. That is why Mary was given an answer.

Luke 1: 35: And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36: And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37: For with God nothing shall be impossible. 38: And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Their questions sound to us like they are almost the same. But God looks on the heart. “The LORD seeth not as man seeth: for man looks on the outward appearance; but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sa 16:7).

The angel said to Zechariah “*you believed not my words.*” But the Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth and the Lord said to Mary,

Luke 1: 46: And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. 46: And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, 47: And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Two persons may do the same things. One may even appear better outwardly than the other. But God sees the difference in the heart.

Lot’s wife look back to Sodom. She was turned into a pillar of salt. That same morning Abraham awoke and looked toward Sodom, nothing happened to him. She looked with longing to go back. Abraham looked as Sodom burned and saw God holy and just; he looked trusting the Lord had delivered Lot as the Lord promised.

The Lord looks on the motive of the heart. Outwardly one may be all but blameless to the eye, but inward his heart be far from God. Another may be a lowly handmaid, but inwardly her heart is full of faith. God looks on the heart.

Zacharias asked in unbelief; Mary asked with astonishment, believing God with admiration. She knew that the Son of God was coming into the world: the Woman’s Seed who is holy without sin; she believed the angel, “His name shall be Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt 1: 21).

The motive of her question was to know how the Lord would form Christ in her womb since she “knew not a man.” Hers was a question filled with amazement at God’s grace like David—“Who am I? What is my house?” (2 Sam 7:18). Like Mephibosheth – “Why would you look on such a dead dog as I am?” (2 Sam9:8). Faith speaks from the heart in astonishment at God’s grace, “Why would the Lord love me? Why would he choose me? Why would Christ die for me? How can God use me?”

GOD IS FAITHFUL

We see God is faithful in that our Lord saved Zacharias from his unbelief. The Lord renewed him in faith, despite his unbelief. We will hear his confession another time. For now, understand that God gives faith and saves his people by grace, despite unbelief being mixed with our faith.

Romans 3:3: For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid.

2 Timothy 2:13: If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Believe the word of the Lord. Believe he is able! Trust Christ. He shall not fail. Nothing is impossible with the Lord.

Amen!