

# God Is...

Jason Abbott

11/29/2020

Welcome to Advent. This is a time when we look backwards to look forwards. We look at the first coming of Christ Jesus—God with us—in order to look forward to his second coming. This is a time to celebrate what God has done in human history so as to grow our anticipation of what he will do at the end of human history.

And this Advent season, we're going to focus our attention on Luke's gospel. Luke was a great historian. He conducted meticulous research—interviewing those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's life and ministry. And, by the Spirit of the Lord, Luke compiled an orderly and inspired account to bless and teach us—recording lots of things that the other gospel writers didn't record. In fact, most of the material which we'll look at in the next few weeks (regarding the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist as well as much of what led up to the birth of Jesus) are known to us only because of Luke's historical labor. *So praise God for that!*

Today we'll begin with one of those unique accounts from the gospel of Luke. This morning we'll encounter a faithful yet broken elderly couple as well as the God who sees and loves them. Let's read today's text together.

## **Luke 1:1-25**

<sup>1</sup> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup>With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

<sup>5</sup>In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. <sup>6</sup>Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. <sup>7</sup>But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

<sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

<sup>23</sup> When his time of service was completed, he returned home. <sup>24</sup> After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. <sup>25</sup> "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

\*\*\*\*\*

Friends, this passage is all about God. It is not primarily a text about a couple who doesn't have a baby. It's not primarily a text about the manifestation of an angel.

It is not primarily a text about a miraculous pregnancy. This passage is about God. *God is!* (1<sup>st</sup>) He is the God of human history. (2<sup>nd</sup>) He is the God of ordinary people. (3<sup>rd</sup>) He is the God of unbelievable redemptions. This passage is all about the Lord. Let's dig in and explore how.

### 1. ...the God of human history (vv. 1-4).

In the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, the author shares this little piece of rather depressing wisdom—"What has been will be again, / what has been done will be done again; / there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). In short, human history is an endless repetition of the same things again and again and again. We are all simply helpless players in a cyclical play. That's the way of things for all who live out their days under the sun.

Now that's unsettling and hopeless stuff. Isn't it? It certainly isn't good news. It isn't gospel to our ears. In fact, it should lead us to despair.

Yet friends, here at the beginning of Luke's gospel, we're given a ray of hope. What Luke records for us is something new. Something unique and unprecedented has happened under the rising and setting sun of human history. Somebody unique and unprecedented has stopped the historical carousel. The One, who is over the sun, has come to rescue all those imprisoned under it. *There is now real hope!* Not merely in some spiritual way. Not just with some kind of enlightenment or new-age wisdom. Not in some intangible sense. *No!* What Luke writes about is substantial and real. What Luke records for us is tangible and physical. What he wants to share with us is nothing less than God with us—God in human history, God in human flesh.

Catch this first point. Don't miss it, friends. God is the God of human history. And, Luke is recording the central events of that history. Everything which you read from this point onward was "investigated" and written down in an "orderly" fashion "so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (vv. 3-4). So that you might have hope, not despair—purpose, not meaninglessness.

R. C. Sproul puts it this way.

*History is the domain of Christ's incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and ascension, and we can't understand our hope for the future without understanding those things that God has already brought to pass in His plan of redemption.... So, how we live today is in large measure determined by how*

*we understand the past as well as how we understand the future. It is because God is a God of history, a God of purpose, a God of telos that [all our lives at this very moment have] eternal significance.<sup>1</sup>*

Friends, our God has entered human history. That's what Luke tells us here. And, that has changed everything—because just as he ascended so he'll come down to us again (Acts 1:11). He'll break into history again and bring an end to all the sin and madness of this fallen world. This is the entire point of Advent—we look back to look forward. We have hope.

- Christ has come so pandemics will not get the last word.
- Christ has come so injustice will not reign forever.
- Christ has come so death will soon be swallowed up by death.

Amen. Come again Lord Jesus!

Well, that's just the introduction to Luke's little history. Let's move forward to our second point about God. He is...

## **2. ...the God of ordinary people (vv. 5-22).**

Luke first introduces us to Zechariah and Elizabeth. They're an elderly couple. Luke stresses this when he tells us that "they were...very old" (v.7). That's important because it highlights the story's tension. This elderly couple doesn't have children. This would have stuck out to Luke's original audience. This would've been a source of potential shame for this couple—a kind of scarlet letter they were forced to wear as husband and wife.

You see, as I've mentioned in other sermons, marriage was the expectation for men and women in the ancient Near East. In fact, it was even considered a duty. And, in opposition to how many view it today, it wasn't simply about companionship or personal fulfillment. It was for the benefit of the greater community as a whole. Marriage was for procreation. And, when a couple couldn't have sons and daughters, it was often considered a curse from God.<sup>2</sup> People began to whisper and wonder—

---

<sup>1</sup> You can read his entire article: "God Is the Lord of History" [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Volume One*: "Child, Children": page 606.

*What sins are they being punished for? What have they done that has angered God? Why hasn't he blessed them with children?*

You've heard these voices. You know the cold cruelty these two encountered for years and years. Elizabeth and Zechariah knew pain and disappointment.

And, this makes them rather ordinary people—people just like you and me. We have all been wounded. We have all experienced these kinds of disappointments. Sure, ours may not be childlessness. Nevertheless, it's something. There's something which makes us feel isolated, judged, and insecure—even potentially bitter at God. What's yours? Where are you wounded?

- Perhaps you've lost someone important—a spouse, a child, a dear friend. And, there's now a hole there. There's a recurring and painful realization. There are times and places which are constant reminders that they're gone, that they're no longer around. *There's a wound.*
- Maybe you always wanted a deep and intimate relationship with your mom or your dad. Maybe you always longed for their approval and affirmation but never really got it. *There's a wound.*
- It could be that you've served faithfully in your job or in some organization and, yet, have never felt recognized or appreciated for your faithful service. You consistently feel passed-over or undervalued. *There's a wound.*

We are all wounded. We are all bruised goods in some way or shape or form. This was true of Zechariah and Elizabeth. And, it's true of you and me. It's the lot of all ordinary people in a sinful and fallen world. It's our reality.

Yet, there's a subtle and hopeful theme here that Luke leaves for us to discover on our own. It resides in Zechariah's name, which literally means "God remembers." There's something important in this—something truly encouraging and comforting in the meaning of his name. It reminds us—as does this little history Luke records—that we (in all of our brokenness and in all of our wounds) are not forgotten by God. God sees us. God remembers us. And, our Lord will never abandon us.

I don't know where your wounds are, friends. But, don't despair or lose hope. God has not forgotten you. God remembers. And, he promises to bring you healing

when you trust in Christ. That's the lesson we learn from Zechariah and Elizabeth. And, that's the lesson we learn at Christmas.

*The Lord God remembers! The Lord God loves! The Lord God restores!*

And, this brings us neatly to our final point. God is...

### **3. ...the God of unbelievable redemptions (vv. 23-25).**

Just consider Elizabeth when she discovers that she's pregnant. Just consider what she celebrates in the quiet of her own heart.

*"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people" (v. 25).*

All of the questions about Zechariah and Elizabeth *gone*. All of the gossiping about a curse because of some secret sin *gone*. All of the coldness and the judgment in the hustle and bustle of everyday life *gone*. Any hint of shame and disgrace *gone*. This faithful couple has been completely exonerated by the Lord.

Yet, there is more. This husband and wife aren't simply reckoned not guilty. They'll now be mentioned in the same breath with the great patriarch and matriarch of their faith—Abraham and Sarah. This a complete and total reversal for this pair. Zechariah and Elizabeth have moved from despair to hope, from disgrace to honor, from curse to blessing. *Theirs is a truly unbelievable redemption!*

Friends, God is the God of unbelievable redemptions.

And, the great redemption history—to which all other redemptions point—began at the first Advent of Christ Jesus. This story of the redemption of Zechariah and Elizabeth, thru their miraculous pregnancy, is ultimately to direct our attention to another far more significant and miraculous pregnancy—one that could only be from the Lord...*the virgin birth!* And, this wouldn't simply lead to the redemption of a dishonored couple but to the redemption of all who are dishonored and disgraced and wounded by sin.

Next week we'll continue this great redemption story as Josh Dekker focuses on the second and most significant miracle pregnancy. But for now, let me leave you with these words which Paul wrote about our God of unbelievable redemptions.

*...we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child... (Galatians 4:3-7).*