

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 1- Luke 1:18-25** 8 A Faithful Promise to a Faithless Priest

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Luke 1:18-25

Now this morning we are continuing our journey through the Story of Salvation as recorded by the beloved physician, Dr. Luke. And we are now at a very fascinating place in Luke's narrative when Zacharias, the priest is having a conversation with an angel from Heaven.

As you recall, Luke begins this magnificent story in verse 5 when he writes:

Luke 1:5-17

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.

7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

8 Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division,

9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense

12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear gripped him.

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.

16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17 It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

And now we come to today’s text and how Zacharias responds to all of this in verse 18 by saying to the angel:

Luke 1:18-25

18 Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.”

19 The angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

20 And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

22 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple.

22 But 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.

23 When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying,

25 “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me*, to take away my disgrace among men.”

You see, dear friends, when God chooses to do so- He can speak and act in massive ways. When He chooses- He can create the entire universe in just six days. When He chooses- He can flood the entire earth- drowning the entire human race except for eight souls- and do it in just 40 days of rain. When God chooses- He can send a shower of fire and brimstone and bury the city of Sodom, the city of Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain at the south end of the Dead Sea for their perverted wickedness. When God chooses- He can part a sea so that two million people can walk through on dry land and a following army be instantaneously drown as the sea which was parted closes on them. When God chooses- He can with His Own Finger write His Law in tables of stone up on a mountain that is shaking with fire and brimstone. When God chooses- He can feed an entire population of people with food that He creates on the spot as He did the Israelites in the wilderness. When God chooses- He can make water come pouring out of solid rock. When God chooses- He can cause the formidable walls of an ancient city named Jericho to fall flat to the ground. When God chooses- He can open the ground and swallow people up. God can do astonishing, powerful, massive things when He chooses to do so.

And when we turn to The Book of the Revelation we can see that God is not through doing massive things. There will come a time in the future when God destroys a third of the oceans of the world; a time when He destroys a third of all the fresh water of the world; a time when He destroys a third of the vegetation of the world; a time when this earth is devastated as a third of its population will die; there is coming a time when the heavens will roll up like a scroll; when the sun goes dark and the moon, of course, therefore cannot shine; a time when the earth experiences meteoric showers of hail burning with fire; a time when, according to the Apostle Peter, when God will cause the elements themselves to melt with fervent heat. It's a time of acts of "un" creation as God implodes the entire universe and replaces it with a new Heaven and a new earth. So when God wants to speak in a cataclysm- He can certainly do it.

But even though God can and does do all of those great and powerful things- most of the time- God is the God of small beginnings. He's the God who works with common people in very ordinary ways in life. For example- you would think that the Story of Salvation would start with some powerful fanfare- maybe some cataclysmic events. But

the Story of Salvation starts with a very common couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth. And he's so undistinguished that the only adjective used to describe him is that he was a "certain" priest- not even a notable one, not a brilliant one, not a famous one, just a certain priest, of which there were about 18,000 at that time in the line of Aaron the priest who served as priests in Israel.

So Zacharias was a common man. And he married a woman named Elizabeth who was the daughter of a priest and had been given the name Elizabeth in honor of the wife of Aaron, the first high priest whose wife had the same name. So, he married a girl who came out of a priestly background and so they shared a rich, religious heritage in Judaism. But they were just plain common people. Except for the two weeks that he served at the Temple in Jerusalem and the three main feasts of Israel- the rest of the time he just lived life in his village and helped people and counseled people and taught them Scripture.

So this great Story begins with this very common couple. And this isn't unusual for God. Abraham was a man who was a common wanderer- just an old man. He and his wife had no children. He was nomadic. God picked him out of all of human kind and made him the father of the Jewish nation through which would come the Scripture and the Messiah- the Savior of the world.

And then there was Isaac after him and there was Jacob and there was Joseph, the patriarchs we call them, with all their sins and all their failures and all their weaknesses. Their lives, frankly, were very void of the miraculous. Their lives were just filled with the common stuff, the common struggles of life in a sinful world and yet, somehow, all of Redemptive History worked its way through them.

And then there was Moses- who was a cast-off baby floating down the river in a basket, rescued by an Egyptian princess. The impulsive, impatient, stuttering, lacking confidence, proud, disobedient Moses. And yet to him was given the privilege of being the recipient of the Divine Law of God, where God established His Law forever- giving to all of mankind the righteous Standard for all people for all times.

Then there was David- a simple shepherd- a poet, a singer, a song writer. David who became a soldier, who later became a powerful warrior and a greatly loved King- who then became David the adulterer, David the murderer, David a terrible father who had a rebellious son who tried to kill him. David who was both strong and weak, who was

both confident and vacillating, who at times was proud and other times was humiliated by his sin.

And then there were the prophets- just common, simple men- who were herdsmen and farmers and priests. God used them to receive and speak His profound Divine Truth to an ungodly world.

And then there were the Apostles- a very motley crew to be sure. The Apostles- just the commonest of men- farmers and fishermen and a despised tax collector and a political terrorist. They were weak. They were doubting. They were ignorant. They were struggling with selfish greed and wrong motivation. They were uneducated. They came from Galilee which was considered the place of the uneducated. And they should have failed. They should have fallen apart. And they should have collapsed under the weight of the enormity of the task that God called them to do.

They should have failed- but they didn't fail. They didn't fall apart- and they didn't collapse- but they were the mighty instruments whom God chose and whom God saved and whom God filled and empowered and equipped so that they could receive the final, full, and completed Revelation of God, and these men articulated the most amazing Truth that the world has ever known- that unworthy sinners are justified and made righteous by faith in the finished Work of Christ alone, and they set that fantastic Truth down in writing and they spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and from a very humble beginning- a prayer meeting- where 120 scared and trembling souls gathered to pray- suddenly there came from Heaven the sound of a rushing mighty wind and they were endued with Power from on High and Christianity was born they went down the steps of that Upper Room into Jerusalem out into Judea and into Samaria and out to the utter most parts of the world. And within 300 years of its very humble beginnings- - Christianity was the dominant religion in the world.

So because God is great we don't have to be great, and God is the God of the common man. God is the God of small beginnings.

1Corinthians 1:26-29 says:

26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

29 so that no man may boast before God.

So God has chosen the simple and the humble and the foolish and the base things through which to effect His glorious Purposes.

And that's precisely how Luke begins this Story. It's the Story of the most *uncommon* event the world ever knew- the coming of the Messiah and Savior of the world. But it has such a common beginning with such a common couple. Now remember, when Luke begins this story that it has been 400 years since there was any Voice heard from God...400 years of Heaven's silence. It has been 500 years since the visit of an angel to Man. It has been over 500 years since that isolated miracle of the fiery furnace during the time of Daniel. And it's been 800 years since miracles came in a season like they did at the time of Elijah and Elisha. So for all that time- God hasn't acted, God hasn't spoken, and God hasn't sent an angel in centuries. Heaven has been silent for a long time.

But suddenly with this angel's appearance- that silence is shattered. And not only did that angel appear- but verse 13 tells us that this angel spoke. So here we have the silence of Heaven broken. An angel appears and there hasn't been one in 500 years. God speaks and He hasn't spoken in over 400 years. And now a miracle birth is announced and there hasn't been one in over 500 years, and this initial miracle initiates an almost endless stream of miracles that go all the way through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

So this is the launching pad for the great Story of Redemption surrounding the arrival of the Messiah and the Savior of the world. And it has the simplest beginning. Zacharias is the main character.

And we studied Zacharias' personal righteousness from verses 5 to 7. He and his wife came from a priestly background. They were true believers in the living God. They were saints of God. They had received the gift of Salvation by Grace alone through faith alone through the finished Work of Christ alone. They had Righteousness from God

imputed to them and they were walking in faithful obedience to the Law of God. Really godly people.

But verse 7 says they had no child and in the Jewish culture that looked like a curse from God and they bore the stigma and the disgrace of that barrenness.

And then we saw the personal righteousness of Zacharias in verses 5 to 7. And then we saw his priestly responsibility in verses 8 to 10. He was in the order of Abijah, one of the twenty-four orders of the priesthood named after the grandsons of Aaron. And those priests would serve, as I said, two different weeks a year in Jerusalem. It was his time, so he was in Jerusalem at the temple doing his priestly duty. He was chosen by lot to a special task and that was to go inside the holy place in the temple, to the altar of incense. They did that at the time of the morning sacrifice, at the time of the evening sacrifice, twice a day, that was a great privilege for a priest. It was by lot that you were chosen and some priests were never chosen and a priest could only be chosen once in his life to do it so they could pass it around. This would have been the high point of his priestly life, to go into the holy place and to have the privilege of putting the incense on the altar of incense because, you see, that was as close to the presence of God as he would ever get since the altar of incense was just outside the veil that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies. This was the high point of all his priestly service. He was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. Only special priests chosen by lot would ever do that. No common person would ever go in there, and only the high priest could go further into the Holy of Holies and that only once a year. So this was the pinnacle of the service. So in he went.

He wasn't going to stay long. He had a little bowl full of the burning coals from off the brazen altar, the altar of burnt offering. He took it in, he dumped the coals into the altar of incense, spread them around and then put the incense on and a great cloud of incense would arise, symbolizing the prayers of the people. He was in there doing that, verse 10 says, the people were outside doing exactly what he was symbolizing, they were praying on the outside.

And while he was in there, and it was only a brief visit, it didn't take very long, an angel of the Lord appeared to him. This takes us to the third point, from his personal righteousness and his priestly responsibility, to his prophetic revelation. Here something happens

that just didn't happen...an angel appeared. This is real. And he tells us he was standing to the right of the altar of incense, that doesn't have any mystical value, that isn't any spiritual message, that is the way to tell us that this actually happened and that angel was locatable. This wasn't a fantasy. This wasn't a figment of his imagination. This wasn't some kind of esoteric mind elevation. An angel came, took on form and stood in a place that he could identify. And verse 12 says Zacharias was troubled when he saw him and fear gripped him. He was absolutely terrified. He knew this, the angel was in a form that he could perceive and see, he realized that he had a heavenly visitor. If you go back in recorded history, it's been 500 years since an angel appeared to Zechariah. Yet here was an angel and panic set in.

And in verse 13 the angel said to him the most unthinkable thing,

Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard...

Zacharias and his wife had prayed for years for a child and they had probably ceased praying in recent years because they were so old-there was no chance that they would ever have a child. The indication that Luke gives us in verse 7 by the Greek words that he used shows us that "old" means they were over 60 and since there was no retirement age for a priest, they could have been in their 70's or even their 80's.

So the angel says your petition has been heard, your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son. What great news! They were guaranteed to have a child and they were guaranteed that the child would be a boy. But then there was also some news that the angel gave him that was not so great:

...and you will give him the name John.

Huh? John? What's that all about? Why John? This is not so great. And then the angel went on to tell Zacharias some of the most fantastic things that any human has ever heard about their child:

Luke 1:14-17

14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

And I am sure about this time that Zacharias is feeling about like Peter and the other Apostles did when Jesus woke up in **Mark 4:41** and He rebuked the wind and the sea and then sat back down and they said to themselves:

Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?

Okay this angel shows up- and panic sets in. Then the angel says the most unthinkable thing, "Your wife is going to have a baby." Okay, a good thing- our prayers have been heard- that's good. But John? Not so good. And all this stuff that this "John" is going to do? What is this all about?

And the angel gives this incredible Revelation from God to Zacharias. This child is going to come and he's going to bring you joy, and he's going to bring your family and your friends joy, and he's going to bring a message of rejoicing to the whole nation Israel because they're going to repent and come back to God. And he's going to point to the Messiah that's going to be the Savior of the world. And consequently the joy is going to extend to the ends of the earth and all the way to the end of time. And he's going to be the forerunner of the Messiah. Your son's going to be a prophet of God. He's going to come in the same spirit and power that Elijah came. He's going to have a powerful impact on Israel. He's going to turn their hearts to God. He's going to be a man filled with the Holy Spirit, even from the time he was in the womb.

Bottom line, this son that they were going to have was going to be extraordinary- so extraordinary that he would have the greatest privilege that could ever come to any Jew. He would have the greatest privilege of being the first person to identify the Messiah. What a privilege!

The prophets had talked about the Messiah- but none of them ever pointed to Him. John would say, pointing his finger in Jesus' direction:

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

John would have the greatest privilege any prophet could ever Have- because he would be the one to point to and identify the long-awaited Messiah and the Savior of the world. Can you imagine how great a privilege that is? But let me remind you what I said last time. That we have the very same privilege today that John had- to point people to Jesus, to show the way to Jesus, to lift up Jesus, to exalt Jesus before the people in what we say and how we live our lives and Who we worship. And we can cry out just like John did, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

Now we've seen Zacharias' personal righteousness and his priestly responsibility and his prophetic revelation. But now I want you to look at another quality about Zacharias- His absolutely faithless response. Read **Luke 1:18** with me:

Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.”

“This is ridiculous, Mr. Angel. What makes you think I'm supposed to believe this? After all, I am an old man and my wife is also old.” This is probably the worst thing that Zacharias could have said. Zacharias could have said, *“I'm overwhelmed, sir. Why me? Would you please pass my thanks unto God?”* But he didn't. He was a skeptic. *“How shall I know this for certain? I'm old and she's old, this can't happen.”* *Miracles don't happen. I don't believe you. In the first place, angels don't show up. In the second place, God doesn't speak. And in the third place miracles don't happen. And this would require a miracle.”*

This reminds me of the people praying for Peter in **The Acts 12**. You remember that in that event- they were having a prayer meeting because Peter's in prison. And they were crying out, *“O God, get Peter out of prison.”* And the Lord said, *“Okay”* and the Lord miraculously lets him out, and Peter comes to the house to tell them he's out and he knocks on the door and Rhoda goes to the door and it's Peter, and she goes back and says, *“Peter's at the door, knocking!”* And they say, *“Can't be, he's in prison- maybe it's his spirit!”* Not exactly great faith.

And this is the same kind of thing. Zacharias prays all those years for a son and finally God gives him an answer and he doesn't believe it. So without any faith at all- he asks, *"How shall I know this for certain?"*

Now this was not a request on how the angel could help Zacharias obey what God had said here- and this was not even a statement made in amazement over the power of the moment- as many have said. No, this was just old fashion sinful wicked unbelief.

You see, God doesn't mind us asking questions as long as those questions are in how we are to obey what God has said- not in rejecting what God has said. Back in **Genesis 15** with Abraham, **Judges 6** with Gideon, with Hezekiah in **2Kings 20** and many other places- men asked questions- but they were not questions of unbelief, but questions of how do I obey this amazing command, or how am I supposed to respond to all of this? But to simply doubt when an angel of God is standing right in front of you talking to you is not a wise course of action.

Now we must remember that Zacharias was a good man. And this shows us that whatever personal righteousness Zacharias may have attained to- it wasn't enough to justify him- and Zacharias needed, just like all of us today need- to be washed and regenerated and justified and he needed the sinless, spotless Righteousness of Jesus Christ to be imputed to him by faith alone. And that is why Zacharias was saved and that is why he was a child of God. But this moment was too much- and he just couldn't believe this. And by saying what he said- Zacharias was in effect saying- *"I need stronger evidence before I will believe this."* And that was sin.

You remember what Jesus said about this very same level of unbelief in **Luke 16**? If they don't believe what Moses and the prophets wrote- if they don't believe the Scriptures- they won't believe if one came back from the dead and stood before them and spoke to them.

And you remember what Peter said in **2Peter 1**; he said, *"Look, I was there at the Mount of Transfiguration, I saw the whole thing, I saw Christ in His glory, I saw Him peel His flesh back and reveal His manifest glory as God, I saw all that but we have a more sure word than my experience which is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of the living God."* What could be more sure than a Word from God?

But Zacharias didn't believe God's Word coming directly from the mouth of an angel- and that is a serious sin. It is serious, dear friends,

to disbelieve the Word of God. Doubt me, doubt what I say- but do not doubt God and do not doubt God's Word. You have no reason to doubt God- God has never and will never fail you. You have absolutely no reason, no excuse at all to doubt one letter of this Holy Book. It is true in part and in whole. It is the only Book on the face of the earth that is inspired. No other book on earth can make that claim. No other book can make the claim that every word in it was exhaled by the very Mouth of God. No other book in history can make the claim that it contains Words that are without error, that it is impossible to be in error, and Words that are eternal and absolute and authoritative and is the one single Standard by which God will judge the world.

And it is the lack of the study of this Holy Book that has caused all the trouble, all the bad teaching, all the wrong living, all the excesses, all the abuses, all the scandals, all the controversies, all the divisions, and all the heresies that has plagued the Church for 2,000 years.

If everybody today would just drop their own manmade theology and their human philosophy and their false doctrine and their sloppy exegesis and simply believe the Bible- the people of God would be one, the Church would be one, and Christ would be exalted like never before. But make no mistake about it, dear friends- Division in the Church, division among believers is caused by people who will not bow their knees to the Authority of God's Word and refuse to obey what this Book teaches and go their own way- doing what is right in their own eyes.

And that is why I am struggling so hard to get you to get into the Bible and to tread it and to study it and to investigate it and to dig deep into it so you can have the understanding of what God said and what God meant by what He said and how you can apply that Divine Truth to your life.

There can be hundreds of different applications of a verse of Scripture, beloved, but hear me clearly- there is only one single correct and true interpretation of every single verse in the Bible. God's Word doesn't mean what *I* say that it means; it doesn't mean what *you* say it means- the Bible says that any private interpretation of Scripture is sinful and wrong- but God's Word means what God said that it means.

There is no such thing as "personal truth" or "personal revelation" or "personal prophecy" or a personal, individual unique relationship with God that is different from Scripture. Divine Truth doesn't

originate from inside of Man, Divine Truth is not subjective, Divine Truth comes from outside of us- from God, and Divine Truth is imposed on Man because for the most part Man doesn't want Truth and doesn't believe it when it is given.

Divine Truth is objective- it come from the Mind and Heart and Mouth of Almighty God is what it is and it doesn't matter if you agree with it or whether you witness with it or whether it suites your sensibilities, or whether it makes you happy or sad, or whether it builds you up or tears you down. What God said is Absolute, it is Eternal, and it is Inspired, Inerrant, Infallible, Relevant, and Authoritative.

And so our job is not to invent "truth"; it is not to manufacture "new truth" or to receive "new revelation" from God; our job is not to hear some "new thing" from God; our job is not to create a "new and improved Gospel"- there isn't anything wrong with the already existing Gospel.

Our job is to study what God has already spoken to show ourselves approved unto God and by God's Grace and empowered by God's Spirit- we are to believe and live and preach and teach and love and obey and defend the already received Revelation from God that is already recorded for us in the 66 Books of the Holy Bible and to not be ashamed of that already received Gospel.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told that as sinners saved by Grace that we are to "reinvent Church" or "follow some new path" or "ride some new wave" or to develop some "new paradigm" or "operate in some prophetic anointing" - but we are told that all of us are to earnestly contend for the very same Faith that was once and for all delivered unto the saints.

God gave Zacharias His Word and Zacharias did not receive it, he did not believe it, he did not know it, he did not like it, he did not witness with it, it didn't fit into his own theology, and, therefore, he did not accept it. And I say to you that God has given us His Word and we do not know it. God has given us His Word and we do not read and study it- and we do not know it. And to add insult to injury- not only do we not know what God has already said- but the modern Church- for the most part- no longer even cares what God has already said because they are out looking for some other words, some other truth, some other revelation- looking for some self-appointed and unaccountable "prophet"

to give them a “new word” because they are patently dissatisfied with the Word that God has already given them.

And we need to repent of our wanderlust that has driven us to seek after something new and look down our nose at the Truth.

God has given us His Word and for the most part- we do not obey it, we do not live by it, we do not trust it, and why in the world do we want more words when we don't obey the Words that we already have? Dear friends- this is sin, this is sin, this is sin! And we must repent- for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

We are the people of God, and the people of God do not know the Word of God, and that is not acceptable! That is unconscionable, that is not appropriate. If God's people do not know God's Word- who will know it? If God's people do not pray, if God's people do not turn from their sin, if God's people do not guard their hearts, if God's people do not examine their lives, if God's people do not fear God, if God's people do not walk softly before God, if God's people do not obey God's Word- who will? The world?

Who will be saved if no one hears? Who will hear if no one speaks? And who will speak if everybody lives a life that has been compromised with sin so that the edge of the sword has been dulled by the blight of unrepented sin?

So I beg you this morning do not feel sorry for Zacharias and say, *“Well, he is a good man and he loves the Lord- he just has this little problem with disbelieving God's Word and arguing with an angel”*. No, do not say that. This is evil sin. This is wickedness. This is rebellion. We should not feel sorry for Zacharias here anymore than we should feel sorry for ourselves and give ourselves an out. No excuse to doubt God. No excuse not to do whatever we need to do so that we will know what God has said and makes sure that we value what God said enough to obey what God has said.

So the angel's response is not harsh, it is not mean- the response that this angel has toward Zacharias' unbelief is perfectly appropriate. Please read **Luke 1:19&20:**

19 The angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

20 And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

And, by the way, the Greek on the phrase "I am Gabriel," is very, very emphatic. So this is not just a common visitor- this is the arch angel Gabriel.

Now the Biblical study of angels is amazing. The Bible teaches that there is a myriad of angels- ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angles is the way the Bible puts it in **The Book of the Revelation**. And even though we don't know the exact number of angels- we do know that there are numerous angels- uncountable numbers of angels that God created, and that are holy and in His Presence 24 hours every day and 7 days every week.

But out of all those holy angles- only two of them are named in the Bible- Michael who is sort of super-angel- who shows up when there's a battle to fight- and Gabriel- who is God's number-one messenger with the important messages from God to Man. No record anywhere in the Bible of any other named holy angel- so when Mormons tells you about the angel Moroni- know that Joseph Smith was either mentally deranged or demon possessed –or both.

When there's a very important message to deliver like the whole of redemptive history in the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom- Gabriel is sent to Daniel to deliver that one. Or when the Messianic story begins and is inaugurated with the birth of the forerunner, John the Baptist, Gabriel shows up to make the announcement to this humble priest. This is important stuff. It was Gabriel who came later in verse 26 to Mary with the announcement that she would bear the Messiah. It was Gabriel who came to Daniel in chapter 9 and told him about the history of redemption, right on to the kingdom of Christ. He is sent with these monumental glorious messages from God.

Now the name "Gabriel" means "mighty one of God." And he tells Zacharias, "**I am Gabriel**", meaning- I'm not just your common run-of-the-mill holy angel. I'm Gabriel. So this is a big message you're getting.

Now why would he introduce himself as Gabriel? Because Zacharias was a man who knew the Old Testament and Gabriel

appeared in the book of **Daniel**, and Zacharias would have known about that meeting with Daniel about 800 years earlier. So Gabriel came with these earth-shattering messages- these monumental announcements. Look at what he tells Zacharias in **Luke 1:19**:

... I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God

"I'm coming down to you directly from the very throne room of God Himself and I've been sent by God to you." Now one thing we must know about angels is that they are always sent by God. They never act independently. They are perfect ambassadors for God, perfect emissaries, and perfect messengers because they only do what God sends them to do, and they only say exactly what God tells them to say.

God is the king of the angels and He sends them with His messages. You can read how God sent angels back in **Exodus 23, Exodus 32, Exodus 33, Numbers 20, 1Chronicles 21, 2Chronicles 32, Daniel 3, Daniel 6, Daniel 8, Daniel 9, and Daniel 10**. God dispatches angels with His messages.

And Gabriel tells Zacharias, *"I came to bring you good news- and this is what I get from you? I brought you good news. This isn't a message of judgment. I know you were afraid, as verse 12 indicates, but I came with good news. This news is so good it's going to make you rejoice, going to make everybody around you rejoice, going to make people in Israel rejoice, going to make the world rejoice. This is good news."*

Now the words "glad tidings" that Luke used at end of **Luke 1:19** is the English translation of the Greek word *euangelizo* or *euangelion*, from which we get the word "Gospel", which is the old King James English word for "good news". The English word "Evangelist", therefore, means: one who preaches the Gospel or one who preaches the Good News. And Luke loves this word, he uses it about ten times and it's never in the other three accounts- except once in **Matthew 11**. Luke loves the word "good news." Because it's the best news. What makes this the best news? Because God is sending a Savior to die for your sins so that you can spend forever in Heaven...that's good news, and it's the best news. And it all gets launched with the arrival of His forerunner.

And as good as this news was- Zacharias just couldn't believe it. So we see his faithless response. And that faithless response quickly turns into his punishing reproof. Read **Luke 1:20**:

And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.

Now the reason that I am dwelling on Gabriel's reaction to Zacharias' unbelief here is because there is a tendency among modern believers to look at this event as God being a bit too harsh. After all- who among *us* would have believed Gabriel? And then we might bring up the way that God killed Uzzah in **1Chronicles 13** simply because he reached out and steadied the ox cart that was carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and God split him in half and that scared David so much that he shut down the celebration and parked the Ark at Obededom's house and David went back to his house to find out why God was so displeased.

And we are tempted to say that God acted out of haste or that God was too harsh, and some would even say that God was wrong for doing this to Uzzah or to Zacharias. And that is precisely the point. We must guard our hearts, dear friends, and take heed to ourselves that we do not arbitrarily hold God to our own human standards of behavior. Turn and read with me to what God Himself said about Himself in **Isaiah 55:6-9**:

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.

9 "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

We must know the correct order of all of this, dear friends. It is not for God to meet up to *our* fallen expectations and then require Him

to answer to us when He does not. No, no, no. It is up to *us* to meet up to *God's* expectations of us and then answer to Him when we do not.

David describes one of the most horrible sins that we could ever commit when he said in **Psalm 50:21**:

...You thought that I was just like you;

When we think that God is a man and that He thinks and acts and talks and operates like we do- we have lowered God to our level and we have raised ourselves up to God's place- and that is classic blasphemy. And that sin is common today and it is becoming more and more common as the knowledge of God contained in sacred Scripture continues to become more and more distant to us.

We must know that God does not have to explain Himself to us, but that we have to explain ourselves to God. God does not have to satisfy our needs or answer our questions- we need to realize that it is we who need to satisfy God's command and expectation for us to obey Him.

Some would ask, *"Well, just Who does God think that He is?"* And God would reply that He thinks that He is God, and He thinks that He is the Creator and the Owner of everything that is- including you and your next breath and your heartbeat, and that He owes us nothing but wrath and we don't deserve anything but eternal damnation and, therefore, we should not presume on His Mercy and we should not presume on His Grace and we should presume to think that God must act in such a way that meets with our approval- but that we should work real hard to add whatever it is that we need to add to our lives and to remove whatever we need to remove from our lives so that we might just attempt to meet up to God's approval.

Almighty God deserves our respect and our obedience; He is entitled to it and it is sin not to give to God what He is entitled to receive from us. And any teaching- no matter how popular it may be- that raises Man to be like God and that lowers God to be like Man is evil and it is wicked and it is from satan and is the very same lie that the serpent sold to Eve and should never be given any credibility by the believer.

And this very same evil, wicked sinful ancient lie is prevalent today and goes by the name of the Health, Wealth and Prosperity

teaching, and in much of the Latter Rain teaching, and in much of the Personal Prophecy teaching, and in much of the Prophetic Anointing teaching.

So a great lesson to learn from this episode with Zacharias is certainly not to think that God is harsh or that God is unfair or mean or anything like that, but to learn that we need to love and to honor and to respect and to fear and to walk softly before God lest a worse thing would happen to us.

So God was not at all harsh here- God was absolutely correct for judging Zacharias because what Zacharias did was sin. And this was the worst kind of sin- because it was unbelief. Look again at **Luke 1:20:**

And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.

Now just on a human level, if you had never been able to have a child and you were in your 70's, and let's say that all of a sudden you were going to have a baby- wouldn't you want to talk about it? I mean, if I just saw an angel and he said that I was going to have son- I would shout it from the housetop.

But Zacharias is judged and he can't even tell the story. He can't even hear the questions that are asked him because in addition to being unable to speak- he's also deaf.

Now over in verse 62- they made signs to him. The child was born at this time and they were going to name him Zacharias Jr.- so they started making signs. And the reason they made signs to him is because Zacharias couldn't speak or hear. And he asked for a tablet and wrote, "His name is to be John." And he had to write that down because God had judged him for his unbelief and he was deaf and mute. And that is pretty severe. But it was also merciful because this judgment was only temporary. And God was telling Zacharias then and us today that if you're going to be so unbelieving as not to hear God's Word, then you're not going to be able to speak it at all. And if you're so faithless as not to believe- then you're going to be useless in proclaiming anything at all.

So God shut him up and that was an every day, every moment reminder of his sin of unbelief. And when people said, "*What happened*

to you?" He would have to write out, *"I was made mute by an angel because I didn't believe when God spoke to me."* And that would have put fear into their hearts- so that they would not doubt God, and so even in this- God was glorified.

Wouldn't it be good if God did that to people today who didn't believe His Word? Then we'd know who they were. Of course, the problem is that we ourselves would go in and out of being mute most of our lives, I think.

So God shut Zacharias up. His normal duty was to teach the Old Testament and to tell people about God and give them counsel and wisdom. That's what a priest did during the most of his year. But now he couldn't tell this wonderful story; he couldn't do anything but bear the shame of having been made deaf and dumb by an act of judgment from God because he didn't believe.

And it wasn't going to change, it says in verse 20, until the day these things take place- or in other words- when the child is born- he will be instantly delivered. And that is the way that it is with the chastisement of the Lord toward His Own people. God's people rebel and God chastens them- not to destroy them- but to teach them, and so suddenly something comes into their life that is so strange and odd and then after the shame of that lesson is learned- the problem goes away as suddenly as it came.

And in verse 57- the child is born and all the family had a great rejoicing and they circumcised him and they decided they'd call him Zacharias after his father- which was a common thing to do. And Elizabeth said, *"No, he's going to be called John."* And they said, *"Well there's nobody in your family named John, why are you going to call him John?"* They made signs to his father trying to tell him they're going to call him Zacharias. And he grabbed a tablet and wrote: *"His name is John."* And they were all astonished. Now read with me **Luke 1:64:**

And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.

Bang! Lesson learned, and now Zacharias is able to speak again- just like that! Now notice that he didn't talk about how mean God had

been to silence him all those months- but as soon as Zacharias' tongue was loosed- the first thing that he did was to praise God!

That shows true humility, and it also shows true repentance. Zacharias knew that he had sinned and he had nine months to get over any animosity that he might have had toward God, and he had turned from his sin of unbelief and he now was able to praise God.

And that is the way that it is with true genuine Biblical repentance. Those who do not repent will tell you how mean God is and those who see their sin and can repent- will praise God.

So now Zacharias is a true believer. He had been told by an angel he was going to have a son. The son was going to be the forerunner of the Messiah. His son was going to be the greatest preacher Israel had ever known. Any father would be proud of that. His son would turn many hearts to God. He wanted to praise God for that but he couldn't, he was mute. He couldn't praise God. His tongue was stopped. The first time it got loosed, all that pent up praise over nine months long came gushing out. That's a punishment in itself, isn't it?, not being able to praise God.

And I love the way that **Luke 1:20** ends:

... which will be fulfilled in their proper time.

Mark it down, write it on the wall- God is Sovereign and He will do His Plan, and it does not rise or fall on the faith of any man. God is Sovereign and does not need our acceptance or our approval or our participation in order for His Will to come to pass. But in His great mercy- God deals with sinful men so that they will be put into a position of genuinely wanting what God wants. So it is true that God will never make you do anything that you don't want to do- but he has a marvelous way of making you willing to want what is His Will. And Zacharias can say "Amen" to that.

What changes is not God's Plan- but your part in its unfolding. Faithless people don't change the Plan of God- they just forfeit the blessedness of doing in it what would have brought God glory and them- the fullness of joy.

God's Plan will come to pass. It will happen exactly the way and in exactly the time that God said it will happen. Too bad so many people forfeit their participation in it, and too bad they forfeit an opportunity

to bring Glory to God themselves, and too bad they forfeit the joy that comes from obeying God.

So learn to hear God's Word beloved. Be quick to trust God. Be quick to obey what God has said. Let it be easy for you to repent. Because please know that you will never be given the privilege of proclaiming God's Word if you're not willing to hear it with faith and obey it from the heart. Great redemptive acts will occur in God's time anyway with or without your faith. But far better that you should believe God and participate and enjoy the privilege of participation in what God is doing than be made dumb and deaf as a public sign of your own hard heart.

Let's come and pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.