

God: The Greatest Promise Keeper

Luke 1:1-25

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

As we draw ever closer to Christmas Day, Pastor Don this past Sunday appropriately took us through an earlier portion of Luke 1 and gave us a message about God's promises to us.

The bottom line is that while we may make promises to each other and to the Lord, we fail a lot of the time. In contrast, as Pastor Don reminded us, God is the greatest promise keeper — and his greatest promise to us is eternal salvation through his son, Jesus Christ, for all who believe in him.

Pastor Don also was sure to emphasize that the Gospel account according to Luke was penned with the precision not only of a physician, which is how Luke made a living, but also of a historian. Research, detail, and truth — wherever it may lead.

In this passage, Luke describes King Herod who at that time was merely a puppet monarch Rome installed to do his bidding — and that the REAL King, the TRUE King, the eternal King Jesus, was coming soon.

Further setting the stage, Luke tells us about Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth — who besides being Mary's much older cousin also was to give birth to John the Baptist. I loved how Pastor Don shared the amazing detail that while 3,327 people are mentioned in the Bible, only 14 of them are described as "righteous." (Wow! There's some deep theology waiting to be unpacked with those numbers alone!) The fact that Zechariah and Elizabeth are called "righteous" means a ton in regard to their character, and Pastor Don noted that they were real people in a real time and space who had a real genealogy and through whom God was working.

Alongside their collective righteousness, however, Zechariah and Elizabeth had some serious challenges. For one thing, they were unable to have a family; despite their prayers, Elizabeth was barren and far beyond her child-bearing years at this point, and all hope perhaps was gone. Yet just as we saw the angel Gabriel visiting Mary in last

week's message, the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah while he was praying and told him Elizabeth would bear a son.

Not used to such a phenomenon (as if anyone would be), the passage says Zechariah was afraid. Gabriel did his best to reassure 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 of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him 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."

Pastor Don also shared some really helpful and reassuring numbers with us. First was the number 450 — as in the number of years that had passed since the prophecy of John's birth was written in the book of Malachi in the Old Testament. Yes, that seems like a long time to wait — and we humans aren't the most patient lot — but God doesn't operate on our timetables. In fact, the Lord exists outside of time ... outside of our mortal and limited dimensions. For God, a day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is a day. (2 Peter 3:8)

Also, in relation to the foretelling of John the Baptist's birth, Pastor Don shared that there are 300 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, the Messiah.

The following are merely eight of them:

- ~ That he would be preceded by a messenger
- ~ That he would be born in Bethlehem — and of a virgin
- ~ That he would enter Jerusalem on a donkey
- ~ That he would be betrayed by a friend ... sold out for 30 pieces of silver ... crucified ... and raised from the dead

Here's where things get really cool. Pastor Don shared that the chances of those eight prophecies coming true in one person is 1 in 1 quintillion (or 1,000,000,000,000,000,000).

That reminds me of an anecdote from a book by evangelist Josh McDowell titled "Evidence That Demands a Verdict" in which he shared that if you covered the state of Texas with silver dollars two-feet deep, marked one silver dollar with an X, mixed the silver dollars thoroughly, walked through the sea of coins blindfolded — and yet managed to somehow pluck that coin marked with an X — that's the same probability that one person in history could fulfill all eight of the aforementioned prophecies.

Further, Pastor Don shared a more astounding number: the chance that 15 messianic prophecies could come true in one person is 1 in 100 tredecillion (or 81 zeros instead of merely 18, as with the quintillion figure we just talked about).

Now remember, Jesus fulfilled all 300 prophecies! So what does that tell you about Jesus? What does that tell you about the ability of the Lord to keep his promises to us?

Unfortunately, Zechariah doesn't believe Gabriel — so to drive home his point, Gabriel tells Zechariah he won't be able to speak until John is born. I liked the way Pastor Don paraphrased what Gabriel might have been aiming for — that it seems it will take an extreme act to convince Zechariah, but when he knows Gabriel's words are true, then maybe he'll finally believe. (How many times has the Lord given you a hard to experience in order that you start trusting and believing in him?)

Still, Pastor Don also pointed out that Zechariah — despite finding himself suddenly without the ability to speak — still carried out his prayer responsibilities, further cementing his righteous reputation.

Pastor Don asked us if we're in such a place right now. Do we sense that God hasn't heard our prayers? That he's not listening ... or stopped listening? We're human, and those feelings are normal, particularly when we're locked into a world that's moving further and further away from the Lord. But the angel Gabriel proclaimed the Lord's eternal care to Elizabeth and Mary, and he loves all of us just as much. God is listening to us ... the question is, are we listening to the Lord?

Further cause to rejoice is the fact that Scripture tells us that even if our faith falters, the Lord remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:8). It's a matter of waiting on the Lord's timing ... and believing, based on what we already know about him, that even a long silence from Lord doesn't mean he stopped listening to us.

On the contrary, he IS listening and hearing ... the Lord is simply following his timetable.

So instead of wondering when God is going to start tuning in to our "frequencies" and making a list of our demands so he can more easily fulfill them ... how about we start tuning into the Lord's frequency, listening to what he's telling us to do, and making a list of those things so we can more easily carry them out?

The Lord is waiting for us to believe ... to trust ... to demonstrate through our actions that we know he's the greatest promise keeper!