

**[1]**  
***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is***  
***Turning Hearts to God***  
**Luke 1:5-25, 57-80**  
**April 15, 2018, Jeff Germs**

Last week I shocked most of you in a couple ways, first by blowing the *shofar*, which is not a very pretty sound — especially when I blow it — and secondly, by talking about pornography for the last half of the sermon. I have been very surprised by the response I have been receiving since then. I've had more positive feedback on that sermon than any sermon I have ever preached. And several men, young and old, courageously stepped out and said they want to join in the battle for purity. If you were not here for that sermon, make sure you go to our website and watch it — and please share it around because this is one of the most important messages for our day.

**[2]**

We will be starting the Conquer Series Monday, April 23rd from 6:30 to 9:00 pm for ten weeks. Men, whether or not you feel like you have an addiction to pornography, we need you in the battle. We are going to open the first session up to all men. I would like to sound the battle cry for every man in the church to come to the first session with no obligation to continue. Even if you do not struggle with an addiction to pornography you need to understand the problem so you can be a part of the solution.

And women, we need your prayer support. Join forces with each other and pray for the men in the church and for yourselves. The battle is for all of us. I know some of you women have asked if there is anything to help you. We are looking at something to help women as well and we'll let you know more down the road a bit. God is calling us to revival and the battle is fierce.

It was during one of the Prayer Encounter nights the week before Easter that I felt the nudge of the Lord to change direction for that sermon. As soon as I made that decision the enemy started to attack. The spiritual battle has been extremely intense. I had to send emails to my staff and board asking them to hold me up in prayer. Last week I received several emails, and notes and Facebook messages from people telling me that they are praying for me because they knew I would be under attack from the enemy. Thank you so much for praying. Satan thought he could defeat us with lies and half truths and accusations, but Jesus proved very faithful as always. He continues to be the hero of the story.

For those of you who are going to courageously battle with us, men and women alike, you need to know that there will be pushback from the Devil. He does not like what's going on at CRBC at all. That means we are going to have to be in prayer a lot more. We are going to have to have some focused prayer in our Growth Groups. There is a prayer team that does battle before the service in the staff room every Sunday morning at 9:00 am. They would love to have you join their team. Pray together as couples. Pray as families. Pray on your own. Pray knowing that the battle is real. Pray also knowing that Jesus has already won the victory and we simply need to walk in that victory and not allow Satan to deceive us with his lies.

As we have said many times in the last few months. There are three threads weaving their way through all history and through our lives right now.

- [3]**
- 1. God is at work**
  - 2. Satan is at work**
  - 3. We most naturally move away from God**

We saw that very clearly last week in the sermon on the Feast of Trumpets. And if we look at our lives closely and are honest we would see it there as well. The more I say this, the more I see it lived out in my life and in the life of the church.

Today marks a transition from the Old Testament to the New. For the remainder of our series we are going to stay in the New Testament. We'll take a bit of a break from the series in the summer and start again in the fall with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

This morning we are going to look at the birth of John the Baptist in Luke 1. Next week we'll look at the ministry of John the Baptist. He was a very unique, quirky prophet of God and the story of his birth is very odd as well. He was a relative of Jesus. Some say he was a cousin, but we don't know that for sure. Let's dig in to the Gospel of Luke.

[4]

**Luke 1:5–25 (NLT)**

***<sup>5</sup> When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron.***

***<sup>6</sup> Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations.***

[5]

***<sup>7</sup> They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.***

***<sup>8</sup> One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. <sup>9</sup> As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.***

The Levitical priests, in the Old Testament, before the Israelites were exiled into Babylon, were divided into twenty-four groups. After the Exile things were disrupted so the original divisions were regrouped. Each of the twenty-four divisions was to serve in the temple for one week, two times a year, plus at the major festivals.

The priests who served on a given day were chosen by lot. And an individual priest, because of how many priests there were, would only get to offer the incense at the daily sacrifices once in his lifetime. Just imagine what it must have been like for Zechariah to finally have his name called. He was an old man and he had been waiting for this day all his life. This was a very climactic moment in Zechariah's career. I would imagine his sensitivities were heightened. It was *the* big day of his career, and it was about to get even more exciting. God was going to dramatically interrupt his big day and make it monumental, not only for his life, but for all humanity.

[6]

***<sup>10</sup> While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.***

So, you need to throw yourself into the story. This is the biggest day of Zechariah's life. There is a huge crowd outside the Holy Place in the Temple. They are probably a group of very piously religious Jews. They loved to be at the Temple praying while the priest was doing his priestly duties. They wouldn't leave until the priest was finished his duties in the Holy Place and had given his blessing on them from Numbers 6:24-25

[7]

**Numbers 6:24–25 (NLT)**

***<sup>24</sup> 'May the Lord bless you and protect you. <sup>25</sup> May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you.***

But, he was taking longer than the other priests normally did and people were starting to wonder what was going on. They were getting antsy.

[8]

***<sup>11</sup> While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. <sup>12</sup> Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him.***

This is the same response everyone has when they encounter angels. Almost without fail, when someone in the Bible saw an angel they freaked out. And sometimes they even fainted. Apparently, angels are very powerful and awesome looking messengers of God. And this was Gabriel, God's chief messenger. This was Zechariah's big day and it just got extremely surreal. What's the first thing angels say to people who encounter them?

[9]

***13 But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. 14 You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth.***

[10]

So, Zechariah and Elizabeth are another couple in their old age who could not have kids, like Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament. They had given up on the idea. And they are told by an angel that, not only will they have a child, but their boy would play a very special part in what God is doing on the earth.

Pay very careful attention to these next verses because we are going to focus on them a bit later along with some other verses. God was going to call John for a very specific purpose in his great rescue plan for humankind.

***16 And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. 17 He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.***

We'll come back to these verses later.

[11]

***18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." 19 Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news!***

I can almost see Gabriel raising his angelic eyebrows in disbelief that Zechariah would doubt him. "Do you know who I am? I am the sovereign God's personal chief messenger. I came directly from the presence of the God who created the heavens and the earth to give you this message from him."

***20 But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."***

[12]

***21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long.***

That very religiously eager crowd outside was getting anxious because Zechariah was taking a lot longer than the other priests normally took.

***22 When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.***

[13]

***23 When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. 24 Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. 25 "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."***

After this scene, Gabriel visited Mary and delivered the news that she, a virgin, would give birth to Jesus, the Messiah. She agreed to comply with the mission God had for her life. Gabriel told her that her relative

Elizabeth, in her old age, was already six months pregnant. So Mary went to visit her for about three months. We'll skip ahead about nine months to verse 57.

[14]

Luke 1:57–80 (NLT)

***57 When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. 58 And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. 59 When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father.***

[15]

***60 But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!" 61 "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." 62 So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. 63 He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John."***

[16]

***64 Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God. 65 Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. 66 Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.***

[17]

The angel Gabriel had already prophesied about what John's future would be like. Now Zechariah, after being mute for nine months, uses his first words to prophecy by the Holy Spirit about Jesus and then about his newborn son, John.

***67 Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: 68 "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. 69 He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, 70 just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago.***

[18]

***71 Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. 72 He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant— 73 the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. 74 We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.***

So, Zechariah looks forward, with eyes of faith, and rejoices that Jesus, the Messiah, will save his people. Next, I imagine Zechariah picking little John up, holding him closely, looking him in the eyes and prophesying about him. It's a very tender moment.

[19]

***76 "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.***

So, firstly John's role in the world, one which he would continually be reminded of by his parents, was to prepare the way for Jesus. That would be his main purpose in life. It was the reason he was chosen and born and called by God. I wonder what that would have been like for Zechariah to look at his little newborn baby and know that he was going to be used by God like that.

[20]

***77 You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. 78 Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."***

***80 John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.***

I want to spend some time on both the angel Gabriel's prophetic words about John as well as Zechariah's prophetic words about his new son. Next week we will look closer at JB and see how these prophecies played out in the life of Israel.

Here's what Gabriel said John would be like.

[21]

***17 He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the Godly.***

Elijah was another very quirky prophet from the Old Testament. John the Baptist was to be a type of Elijah. They were very similar. Some people believed that John was Elijah come back from the dead. It doesn't say that, it says, "***He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah.***" John the Baptist's main purpose in life would be to prepare the people for Jesus, the Messiah.

He was prophesied about by Isaiah a few hundreds years before he was born.

[22]

**Isaiah 40:3 (NLT)**

***3 Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, "Clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!"***

It's important to understand the Jewish religious milieu John was born into. For the most part, it was not good at all. It was corrupt. We talked about that a few weeks ago on Palm Sunday. The religious system was powerful and kept the average person under its thumb using guilt manipulation to coerce and dominate them.

Jesus went head to head with religious leaders many times. He called them hypocrites, spiritually blind, white washed tombs, and a brood of vipers, saying that they laid heavy weights on people and didn't lift a finger to help them. They were, for the most part, far from God. Their religious system became more important to them than their relationship with God. For them it was all about sin management.

[23]

**And when your life is about sin management instead of relationship you will constantly be comparing yourself to others and attempt to be "holier than thou."** That is what they were like, continually pointing their fingers at others, while their own hearts remained hard and calloused.

Last week we quoted from what God said through the prophet Isaiah.

[24]

**Isaiah 58:1-2 (NLT)**

***1 "Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins! 2 Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to learn all about me. They act like a righteous nation that would never abandon the laws of its God. They ask me to take action on their behalf, pretending they want to be near me.***

In a large part, that's what the religious Jews had become right up into the New Testament times. It was an act. They were playing church, so to speak. Do this. Don't do that. The power of God was not in their lives at all.

Paul described what they were like to his protégé, Timothy.

[25]

**2 Timothy 3:5 (NLT)**

***<sup>5</sup> They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!***

So, John the Baptist was chosen by God from before birth and called to get the attention of God's people and call them back into relationship with God.

**[26]**

***<sup>17</sup> He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.***

Gabriel actually quoted there from the prophet Malachi about John.

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**Malachi 4:6 (NLT)**

***<sup>6</sup> His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.***

John the Baptist would sound a wake up call to fathers, and mothers, and children to get their hearts right with God. Thousands of people would flock to him to listen to his radical preaching and repent of their hardened hearts and turn to God, preparing the way for Jesus.

When we repent of the hardness of our hearts there is at least the possibility of relationships being restored. Many times, the reason we have rifts between us and others is because we aren't willing to humble ourselves and own our part in the rift. God is all about relationship. That is why he created us. And when our relationships are broken it is very difficult to live with the peace God has called us to.

Let's look at what Zechariah said about his little baby.

**[28]**

**Luke 1: 76-79 (NLT)**

***<sup>76</sup> "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. <sup>77</sup> You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. <sup>78</sup> Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."***

So, John the Baptist would point people to Jesus so they could repent and have their sins forgiven and find the peace of God.

**[29]**

**Peace is not possible if you are living with known sin.** It will torment you, unless your heart has become hard and calloused like the religious people of Jesus' day.

The problem is that we have been socialized over the decades so that our culture no longer believes that sin is sin. I know this is a crass way of saying it, but we have drunk the "Kool-aid" — and it's killing us.

Last week I told you about Alfred Kinsey who was, in a large part, a catalyst for the sexual revolution of the 1960's and 70's. Through his flawed and debauched research about the sexual behaviours of males and females, young and old, he came to the erroneous conclusion that there should be absolutely no boundaries around sexual activity.

Using data from pedophiles that he hired to abuse children and prisoners, he theorized that monogamy was not normal or healthy. Kinsey was a child abuser. He was into spouse swapping and multiple sexual partners, homosexual and heterosexual. And very shockingly, he was also into bestiality. It was his flawed

research that has led to the moral sexual decline of our society over the last few decades. And Kinsey is still celebrated today.

Last week we talked about pornography and how it has become mainstream. Another phenomenon that has become commonplace is sex outside of marriage. If you are over 18 and still a virgin today, you are thought of as very strange. In almost every show and movie you watch today you are made to feel shameful if you are a virgin. Because of Kinsey's depraved studies we have heard that message over and over again for the last several decades and young and old have come to believe it, many even in the church.

Friends, God is calling us to repentance. He is calling us to turn our hearts towards him. His desire is that we would live in peace. But, many of us have believed the lie of Satan, the father of lies, and the accuser of the brethren, that we have to be like everyone else in order to find happiness. But that lie only leads to pain.

There is nobody here this morning who does not need to repent of some kind of hardness of heart. We all do, myself included. Just like every other man here, I am tempted by lust and I have to keep constantly vigilant of my thought life. Sometimes my mind goes where it shouldn't and I have to catch it before it takes me down a destructive road. I am no different than any of you.

You might be here this morning and don't feel like you struggle with any sexual temptations. Please do not judge those who do, because there *are* sins you struggle with, such as pride, or judgementalism, or anger, or impatience, or greed, or any number of things that are just as bad and dangerous as any of these sexual sins. Nobody can look at anyone with an air of superiority and think they are better off.

The Bible says, "***we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All of us. There is none righteous, no not one. Each of us, like sheep, have gone astray***" (Romans 3:23, Isaiah 53:6).

In other words, we are all in the same boat. Nobody is immune. This is not about singling people out. It is about sounding the wake up call that we all have a problem and we need Jesus.

Jesus has called each of us to be lights in our very dark world. He has not called to point our long, religious fingers of judgement at our world. He has called us to reach out and love those around us with the love of Jesus so others would join us in our journey towards the heart of God.

In order for that to happen we need a revival of our hearts. We need to pray that our hearts would break for the things that break the heart of God. We need to ask God to soften our hearts and turn towards him. As we step out of the darkness and into the light fellowship becomes possible, relationships will be restored and peace will come. That is God's goal for us.

[30]

**1 John 1:7–9 (NLT)**

***<sup>7</sup> But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. <sup>9</sup> But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.***

God does not want us to live in shame. If you are experiencing shame, that comes from Satan. He is the accuser. Jesus, as he did with the adulterous woman, always uncondemningly and lovingly invites us to something better, life with him, to take his yoke upon us so we can learn from him how to live the real abundant life in exchange for the counterfeit that Satan offers.



**Turning Hearts to God**  
**April 15, 2018, Jeff Germs**  
**Luke 1:5-25, 57-80**  
**Week of April 15, 2018**

**Objective of this study:** To turn our hearts toward God.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Luke 1:68-79** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

**Welcome (5 minutes)**

Who were you named after?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

**Word (30-45 minutes)**

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. What was the social/religious milieu John was born into? (eg. Matthew 23:1-7 ff., 2 Timothy 3:5)
3. Read Luke 1:5-25, 57-80.
  1. What captures your attention in this passage?
  2. There are so many instances in this chapter of people getting their attention captured in various ways. Find as many as you can.
  3. Look closely at Gabriel's and Zechariah's prophecies about John. What did each of them predict he would do or be?

**Sermon Quote:** “When we repent of the hardness of our hearts there is at least the possibility of relationships being restored. Many times, the reason we have rifts between us and others is because we aren't willing to humble ourselves and own our part in the rift. God is all about relationship. That is why he created us. And when our relationships are broken it is very difficult to live with the peace God has called us to.”

**Work (30-45 minutes)**

1. What changes in culture (positive or negative) has Canada experienced over the last few decades?
  1. How do these changes make you feel?
2. What should our response, as followers of Jesus, to all of this be? If not the long pointy finger of judgement, then what?

**Sermon Quote:** “Peace is not possible if you are living with known sin. It will torment you, unless your heart has become hard and calloused like the religious people of Jesus' day.”



**Sermon Quote:** “Jesus has called each of us to be lights in our very dark world. He has not called to point our long, religious fingers of judgement at our world. He has called us to reach out and love those around us with the love of Jesus so others would join us in our journey towards the heart of God. In order for that to happen we need a revival of our hearts. We need to pray that our hearts would break for the things that break the heart of God. We need to ask God to soften our hearts and turn towards him.”

3. How is the Holy Spirit getting your attention?

### **Prayer**

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
  - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
  - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
  - C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
  - D. **Our missionary of the month:** Mark and Catherine Buhler
  - E. **Our missionary of the week:** Pierre and Hannah Jutras in Poland
  - F. **Local CR church:** Black Creek Community Church - Pastors Barry and Peter