

Luke 1:5-25 - Be Like the Angels

Welcome everyone.. As you might have guessed from the picture up on the overhead... we are going to be starting a new sermon series in the gospel of Luke. For how long? I don't know. I doubt we will preach through every verse in the gospel ... but at the end of this series, you should have a deeper appreciation for what has become one of my favourite books in the Bible..

But before we start... lets ask ourselves a question. Why 4 Gospels? We have the gospel according to Matthew... the gospel according the Mark... the gospel according to Luke.. and the gospel according to John... Why 4? Wasn't one enough?

C.S. Lewis was part of a famous circle of friends called the Inklings, which included J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of The Lord of the Rings as well as the Hobbit., and also another author - Charles Williams, who died unexpectedly." These three were especially close within the group... and here is a C.S. Lewis' quote reflecting on the loss of his friend Charles Williams.

"In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's [Tolkien's] reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald...In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed increases the fruition which each of us has of God. For every soul, seeing God in his or her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest.

That's a long quote.. Here's how Tim Keller sums it up:

"Lewis is saying that it took a community to know an individual. It takes a community to know an individual. How much more would this be true of Jesus Christ?"

The reason why we have 4 Gospels is because God wants to give us 4 different angles or takes on to the person of Jesus Christ. You see, while there are many

overlaps and similarities within the gospels, the order and presentation of the story IS unique and intentionally so... For instance, the gospel of Mark...If you are reading it correctly, you will be out of breathe... That's because it's very fast paced. It always picks up with a, "and then He went... or again He said... and this is to show the power of Christ..

As A. H. Mcneil put it, whereas in Matthew the keynote may be said to be royalty, and in Mark power, in Luke it is love.

And I think this is significant.. We live in a time and culture where the love of many have grown cold... so it is very intentional that we are in Luke and not Matthew or Mark... Because it is my sincere hope that as the warm rays of God's love shines down upon us in the person and work of His Son... our hearts will be moved to love God and love others deeply.

So just to recap... the gospel of Luke is about... Jesus... and His love... as you will be seeing in the weeks to come..

But for now, lets get right into Luke 1.

Luke 1. We are going to pick up at verse 11. And in the opening scenes of this gospel we read...

And there appeared to him [the priest Zechariah] an angel of the Lord!

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And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord!

I wish the children were here with us... because there is a sense in which we who have grown up with these Bible stories lose a sense of appreciation and wonder... An ANGEL appeared! Come on guys... don't read the Bible so matter-of factly! Let your imagination run!

I mean, how would you feel if an angel were to suddenly appear before you!

To fully appreciate the significance of this event, we need to get in the shoes of Zechariah.. We need to use our imagination...

You see... the visitation by the angel of the Lord was the first communication from God to Israel since the days of Malachi... In other words... this visitation signalled the end of 400 years of silence...

To be sure... if an angel ever appeared before me... that's going to go in the books! You know how at gatherings, people like to talk about the famous people they've met or know... Hey... my name's John and I grew up in the same neighbourhood has Brad Pitt.. Or... Hi, my name is James and I took a photo with the king of K-pop Rain... Or.. hi my name is Bob and I've been to the moon... Well.. GUESS WHAT! MY name is Joseph and I MET GABRIEL, an angel! Instant win!

But all jokes aside... just having an angel appear is amazing... but AFTER 400 years of silence? How do you think Zechariah must have felt? During the 400 years of silence, most of the nation of Israel had lost faith and a miasma of hopelessness had settled which suffocated the people... All that was left of the once great people of God was a hallow shell of Judaism that was more tradition than it was Bible...

Now, enter Zechariah, the priest... and his wife Elizabeth... We read in verse 6 that they were both righteous before God... walking blameless in all the commandment and statutes of the Lord... In a time, when the Jews themselves took the Scriptures lightly, these two were FAITHFUL even in the midst of the 400 years of silence....

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

And so... see the contrast here... Zechariah and Elizabeth... two faithful servants of God in the midst of a 400 year long period of spiritual dryness and silence... AND you would expect... in verse 7 - and they had MANY children! And they had many sheep and goats... And the Lord BLESSED them for their faithful obedience... No... what they got in return was barrenness..

v. 6- they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord... BUT they had no children! Let that hit you!

We like to think...even when we KNOW that it is WRONG... we can't keep ourselves from expecting that faithfulness will result in a get out of jail card... That somehow, our faithfulness toward God will exempt us from hardship! But THEY had no CHILD!

Look it. Living in a culture that promotes abortion and low-birth rates... we can hardly even begin to understand how painful it must have been for Elizabeth to be barren.... To an ancient Jew... to be without child was the ultimate curse and greatest of sorrows (cf. 1 Sam. 1:10)...We can be sure that there was a lot of pointing fingers and gossip around the topic of Elizabeth's barrenness.

How are we to wrap our minds around this? Here are two faithful people of God ... who are experiencing prolonged hardship and reproach...

Was it not our Lord Jesus Himself who said that we will face much trouble in this life? Was it not our Lord Jesus who said that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom? Was it not our Lord Jesus who said that we would suffer for His Name's sake? But we must remember that it is not an ANGRY hand... but the loving hand of our all-wise Father who is measuring out for us our allotted portion of trials... SO THAT when we come out of the fire... we might be more like Him... more prepared to dwell in eternal glory with Him...

Angels enjoying watching the gospel.

It is striking that out of all the ways that God could have chosen to announce the coming of Christ... He chose angels... He didn't line up the planets or spell out Jesus' name in the stars... or even send some prophet.... He chose angels. Why?

Well for one, it was to clearly teach the church that Jesus is no angel... but the Lord of angels... as well as of men... Angels announced His coming... Angels announced His birth.. Angels rejoiced at His appearing... and by doing so, the angels made it clear that Jesus was not one of them... but one far above them...

So God chose to communicate the coming of Jesus Christ through angels to make clear that His Son was one far above them... But it is also to highlight the fact that angels take a deep interest in the person and work of Jesus Christ... You see... angels are perfect and sinless beings ... already in heaven... fully obeying God in all that He commands and wills....worshipping Him in His presence...they have NEVER disobeyed God... and so... they HAVE NO GOSPEL! They need no gospel.. and the angels that at one time disobeyed... well, they are in hell..Angels are not recipients of this grace...this gift. YET...they rejoice in it and long to look into it! How much more than should we who are the recipients and benefactors of this grace of God CELEBRATE and rejoice! We would do well to attune our minds and attitudes to that of the angels... because they show us what heaven is going to be like... Angels spend their time watching the gospel play out...Angels spend their time watching the gospel being worked out... AND they rejoice! They are at the edge of their seats LOOKING at what God is doing in you and me... If you're sole interest at the end of the day coming back from work or school is to watch the Simpsons or futurama.. You are not yet ready to enter heaven... Where we will be spending eternity singing about the cross.

Angels fear God

Now, I would like to spend more time on this.. but for the sake of time.. lets move on to look at the effect the angel had on Zachariah...

v. 12- We are told that he was troubled and fear fell upon Him... This was not because Zachariah was an old frail man.. No - this is the way EVERYONE reacts before the presence of angels... We see this in Moses at the burning bush...Gideon at his father's yard... Isaiah within his vision... Daniel at the river of Hiddekel... and John at the isle of Patmos - without exception - everyone to whom an angel appeared fell down trembling in awe and fear... And make no mistake - these were SAVED men.. Men whose holiness far outweighed our OWN. And yet - EVEN they.. WITHOUT exception... both Old Testament and New Testament men of God... THEY ALL fell facedown before angels...

And so... I'm not saying that angels no longer come to people in dreams and visions... but make this a test - are the people who claim to have these angelic encounters trembling in holy fear? Or are they chitterish and spouting nonsense? There are many people... many self acclaimed prophets who claim they can lead you into the presence of angels.. Ok. If you are not flat on your face and worshiping God in fear and trembling - what you have encountered is a false prophet you brings you into the presence of the evil one who disguises himself as an angel of light.

Look it.

If the majesty of angels are so great and terrible, what must the Lord of angels be like? And just in case you missed it - that is who we are gathering here to worship! The one we call FRIEND.. the one we call Lord... is not just our LORD.. but the Lord of heaven and earth! The commander of angel armies and the King of kings who sits enthroned in irreproachable glory! To whom earth is a footstool and eternity His residential... Who through the power of His Word spoke a billion galaxies into existence... And who is even now upholding IT ALL with the word of His power!

That is the God we worship... and this is what Luke 1 prepare us for... Luke is setting a stage for the coming of the King of kings... and so, make no mistake. Jesus Christ... Son of God - who comes to us... poor and humble... born in a manger... growing up as a lowly carpenter... befriending fisherman...lepers, blind men... prostitutes, even men who were once demon-possessed... This man IS the one to whom the angels bow in FEAR! Before whom the seraphim and the archangel bow down and worship.. covering their faces with their wings... lest they be consumed by glory... This is the God who we gather to worship...

As a church... lets aim to be more like the angels. I know that we don't hear that kind of language often.... we hear a lot about becoming more like Christ... but lets strive to be more like the angels. And here's what that looks like in your life.

#1. The angels' favourite TV program if you will - is the gospel channel. They love to watch people be saved as they believe and grow in the knowledge of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ... And they LOVE to sing about the gospel. In fact, they sing about the cross FOR ETERNITY.

SO. If the gospel is boring... if you are bored of church. If you are bored of Jesus... Repent. Pray to God and ask Him to give you eyes that SEE so that you can ENJOY the gospel like the angels do. God forbid that we - who are the beneficiaries of the gospel - we who have FRONT row seats to God's cosmic drama being unfolded in history... God forbid that we rejoice in the gospel less than the angels who merely get to look at it from a distance...

#2. Secondly, the angels show us what the measure of true greatness is... We didn't get the chance to look at the message the angel had for Zechariah before.. but here it is... v. 13... 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... "he shall be great in the sight the Lord.

Man's measure of greatness is all vanity and lies. Rich, successful, famous...people... leaders and artists and singers and people in authority are viewed as being "great" in this world ... However, such greatness is not recognized in the least by God's angels... Angels did not say of Alexander - great... angels did not say of the Egyptian pharaoh's and their pyramids - great... Angels did not say of Arnold Schwarzenegger - great! Angels did not say of Bill Gates, great. Rather... they called John... a man who lived in the wilderness... clothed in rags and who ate locusts for food... they called this man great....

In other words, those who do great things for God are reckoned great.... Those who do little for God are reckoned little.

-Most of us here are parents or will be parents in the future... Let us take the angels as our example... Let us seek for ourselves and ALSO for our children that true greatness which will be recognized by countless angels in the age to come... It is a greatness that is within the reaches of all - it does not matter how rich or poor you are, it does not matter what your grades are or what your job is.... It does not depend on your network or your net worth...

-It is the greatness which is bestowed upon all who prepare the way of the Lord... All who follow Christ and advance His kingdom... all who carry the cross... we are told ... will be given a crown! Such a life will mean little honour for you and your child in this life.. But great is your reward in heaven!

#3. And this is my last point. Angels fear God. Angels fear God... Here's what that does not mean. They do not FEAR judgement from God. Fearing God means having such a reverence for Him that it greatly impacts the way we live our lives. To "fear" God is to respect Him.. to obey Him and to worship Him in awe. The longer you are a Christian.. the more you MUST see of the BIGNESS and holiness of God! And so.. you know what.. lets do that right now... As we respond now to the message by standing up and SINGING to who? to GOD! To the Lord of angels... lets sing with fear and trembling... in awe and reverence for who He is and what He has done...!

