

11/28/10

Jesus Can Take Away Your Disgrace – Luke 1:5-25

- let me begin our time this morning with a hard question – have you ever been in a situation where you were disgraced or disappointed?...
 - did something wrong...or you let other people down...you failed in some way...
 - or you really hoped something would happen, and it never did...
 - and now you don't want to face people in your life because of the fear of rejection or ridicule or just the constant reminder that something happened for them that didn't happen for you?...
- have you ever been there?...In the land of the disappointed or disgraced?...I suppose we all have in one way or another...
 - even if we just limited the discussion to the way we speak for a moment...James makes it clear...
 - **James 3:2 - For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.**
 - **James 3:8 - But no one can tame the tongue; *it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.***
 - so we've all disgraced ourselves with our words...we've said things for which now we're ashamed...
 - we've all had dreams that were dashed...it just didn't turn out the way had hoped...
- that can even color the way a person thinks about himself...
 - in fact, please think about this for a moment...when you look in the mirror...what do you see?
 - even if you messed up—but have asked forgiveness from God and the appropriate people---what do you see now?...
 - or even if that disappointment was not even your fault to begin with...what do you see?
 - do you know the way many people would answer that question?...here's what they see--their sin...their failure...their disappointment...their guilt...
 - that action, or that habit, or that event...defines their existence...
 - I'm the person who _____ (you fill in the blank)...
 - I'm the thief...
 - I'm the person who never got the promotion...
 - I'm the liar...
 - I'm the one who never graduated...
 - I'm the drunk...
 - I'm the one who never married...
 - I'm the one who lost his job...
 - I'm the person who had premarital sex...
 - I'm the person with a failed marriage...
 - I'm the person whose house went back to the bank...
 - I'm the person whose child went astray...
- it's an existence that is defined by shame...by disappointment...by failure...by disgrace...
- now here's my question for you – what does any of that have to do with Christmas?....
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Luke chapter 1 (page 43 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you....)

- our Christmas series this year is entitled **Taking the Next Step in the Knowledge of Our Savior...**

- this morning we're going to study the delightful story of a couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth...the parents of a man named John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah...

- and we're going to see that a central focus of their story was the issue of disgrace and shame and disappointment...

- **read Luke 1:1-25**

- we're talking this morning about how **Jesus Can Remove Your Disgrace**

- with the time we have remaining, let's look for **4 principles to help you put shame and disappointment in its place.**

I. Disgrace, Disappointment, and Shame are Conditions We All Experience.

- now, let's back up for a moment and think about....

A. The purpose of Luke's Gospel

1. Luke

- was a medical doctor, and a traveling companion with the apostle Paul...

- so he was intimately acquainted with the birth and development of the early church...

- and he had seen how the gospel had impacted all kinds of people who were ashamed, or disappointed, or disgraced...

2. The recipient

- he was writing to a man named Theophilus

- we don't know much about this man

- some have suggested that perhaps he was a well known Roman official who had come to Christ under Paul's ministry – part of Caesar's household...we don't know that for sure...

- but it is very apparent that unlike a Gospel like Matthew that was clearly written to Jewish men and women, Luke was writing to Gentiles...

- Here's a few reasons we believe that...

1. Frequently explained Jewish localities...would not have taken the time to do that if he had been writing to Jews...

2. Traced the genealogy of Christ all the way back to Adam...because Jesus was interested in redeeming people from every nation not just Israel...

3. Used a number of words that would have been familiar to Gentile readers unlike the gospel of Matthew that used many more Jewish terms...

3. No question about the purpose

- **Luke 1:3-4 - it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.**

- that is a great example of how God used human beings to develop and codify the Word of God...

- later Peter would say that **2 Peter 1:21 - for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

- so Luke wanted this man and all the others who would eventually read this gospel to have the facts necessary to either come to a place of believing in Christ, or if they had already trusted Him, having their faith confirmed...or solidified...
- now, you can imagine Dr. Luke, after he has done all this research, and he has all these documents in front of him, deciding which story to use at the beginning...
 - undoubtedly, there are all sorts of details and anecdotes that are being left out...
 - so what we have before us is here for a reason...
 - writing words that are inspired of God....he decided to begin with this fascinating story of the parents of John the Baptist...and I'd like to suggest to you that this was...

B. The ideal way to begin this book.

- it begins with...

1. Zacharias whose name means – “The Lord has remembered”

- so there's a lesson of sorts even in that...
- he was a country priest...Bible scholars believe there were about 8000 such persons in Israel at the time...
- these men were divided according to an arrangement that went all the way back to the time of David...
- there were 24 divisions that contained about 300 priests each...and the text even tells us that **Luke 1:5 - a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah;**
 - we also read that he was married to...

2. Elizabeth

- she was also of priestly descent
- **Luke 1:5 - he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.**
 - so this was just an ideal couple in many ways...
 - and their lifestyle core that out...

3. Their lifestyle

- the text says that...
- **Luke 1:6 - They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.**
 - and of course that doesn't mean that they were perfect---but it does mean that they were serious about keeping the OT law...in many ways they were the real thing...
 - and that's fine and good until we get to verse 7...which explains...

4. Their disgrace

- **Luke 1:7 - But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.**
 - now, let me just push the pause button for a moment and say that I realize we are on very tender territory when we raise the issue of infertility...
 - many couples in our church have and do struggle with that...
 - that's why we instruct people around here to be very careful about this topic because sometimes people can be incredibly insensitive and rude...and you can't always control what Aunt Mable is going to say at the holiday table—but we can surely control what is said at the church-house...
 - but we have to deal with the text...Elizabeth herself will later refer to their condition as **Luke 1:26 – her disgrace among men.**

- and that's not to suggest that infertility is direct judgment from God for some sort of wrongdoing...but that doesn't stop people from talking/judging...and it doesn't

stop the couple from wondering, and questioning, and sometimes even condemning themselves...

- now, it's very important to see...

C. The way Zacharias and Elizabeth illustrate you and me.

- the biggest problem that Zacharias had was not their physical barrenness...it was their spiritual barrenness...
- even though they were righteous in many ways...they were certainly not perfect...
- and though they clearly wanted a baby...more importantly they needed a Savior...they needed the promised Messiah of Israel...but God had been silent on that subject for more than 400 years...
- and now He was about to speak...and Zacharias and Elizabeth had to decide if they would believe God's Word...but so did everybody else...like Theophilus, and the original recipients of this gospel, and ultimately people like you and me...

- because here's the bottom line... Disgrace, Disappointment, and Shame...those are universal experiences...aren't they?...

- **1 John 1:8 - If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.**
- **1 John 1:10 - If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.**
- **Romans 3:10 - as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;**
- **Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

- we're spiritually barren because we could never earn enough righteousness to satisfy God's just demands...

- and in this sin-cursed world...we face disappointment as things don't always work out the way we hoped or dreamed...

- the point is – if the Bible tells us anything – it's that this side of heaven – disgrace, disappointment, and shame---those are universal experiences....

- so what does the Lord do...He meets us at that very point...with promises...

II. God's Promises Can Turn Shame into Joy

A. You never know what a day might bring.

- the passage tells us that Zacharias was simply performing his priestly service...

- we'll learn in a minute that he and Elizabeth had been praying for a child...but right now, he's...

- **Luke 1:8 - Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division...**

- which tells us what?...even when you're disappointed...even when you don't see how things could possibly work out...be sure you're doing the things today that you know you ought to be doing...

- what would have happened if Zacharias and Elizabeth had gotten discouraged and just quit serving God...

- see they didn't confuse...it hasn't happened with it hasn't happened yet...

- or God hasn't moved yet with God never will, or God never can...

- so Zacharias is faithfully serving...and the text says... **Luke 1:9 - according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.**

- now, we know from history that this was an incredible honor...

- some priests went their entire ministry and were never allowed this privilege to go into the Holy place and offer incense to the Lord...
- once you received this honor – it was the height of your ministry career...you were not allowed to do this twice...
- so the passage is clear... **Luke 1:10 - And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.**
- and Zacharias goes in and an angel appears to him...
 - and just like any of us, the passage says that he was gripped with fear...
 - and the angel calms him down and then gives him an astounding...

B. Promise about Elizabeth's barrenness.

- **Luke 1:13-14 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. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth..."**
- now, if for some reason Zacharias didn't believe this really was an angel from God based on what he was seeing...that message alone certainly should have confirmed it...
 - how else would anyone have known the content of he and Elizabeth's prayers?...
 - but that was just the beginning of the news...because there was this curious detail about everyone rejoicing at the baby's birth....why?....

C. Promise about mankind's barrenness.

- **Luke 1:17-18 - "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."**
- this was the part of the message that should have especially blown Zacharias away...not simply that a son was going to be born to their family, but that the Messiah was going to be born to the world...

- now, where does all of this lead us?....

III. You Have to Decide if You Will Believe the Promises of God.

- it was time for Zacharias to choose to place his faith in what this angel was proclaiming...
- but that's not what happened, is it?...

A. Zacharias' lapse.

- **Luke 1:18 - 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."**
- a few minutes ago I asked you a very important question...what do you see when you look in the mirror?...
 - based on what we just read...how would Zacharias have to answer that question?...I see an old man married to an old woman and that is the end of my resources...
 - note to self – if God ever promises you something – be very careful about what you choose to see when you look in the mirror...
 - you can either choose to see yourself and your situation through who you believe you are and what you believe is true...

- or you can see yourself and your situation through who God says you are and what He says is true...
- and here's a second note – if you're planning on getting that one wrong...you may want to buy a couple of legal pads and a fresh pack of pens...because you might be spending the next several months not being able to speak because God is not particularly happy when we choose to ignore the lens He's provided for how to view ourselves and our situation...
- and that's why there to be...

B. Gabriel's punishment.

- **Luke 1:19-20 - 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. "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 this response was necessary for several reasons...as a warning to everyone who heard this story...that refusing to believe what was being said about the Messiah was a serious lapse with significant consequences...
- but also this...this was a punitive miracle, but a miracle nonetheless...Zacharias didn't have to spend a lot of time proving to people that something supernatural had just taken place...unless they were going to say that he was just faking it...something very unusual was about to occur...

- now let's focus especially on the...

C. Challenge for you and me.

1. If you have not yet become a follower of Christ.

- **Choose to believe God's promises regarding your present condition.**

a. For those who believe their condition is not that bad.

John 3:18-21 - He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

- one of the biggest challenges in this culture is convincing men and women that they cannot get to heaven on their own...
- for some, it's not a matter of feeling disgrace or shame...it's a matter of being in a position of disgrace and shame but not realizing it...
- but please think about this – if you could get to heaven by your own righteousness, then why do we have Christmas?...
- why did God have to send His Son at all?...
- and what God's Word says about your condition may be as surprising to you as this angel's message was to Zacharias...but that does not make it any less true...

- but there's another category of person who needs this as well, but from the opposite perspective...

b. For those who believe their condition is beyond hope.

- I'm thinking now about the kind of person who has a fresh helping of shame and guilt every morning for breakfast...
- and has pretty much concluded that they are way beyond helpless and hopeless...
- here's what Scripture says about that...
 - Romans 10:13 - WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.
 - that is why the gospel of Luke is filled with stories of men and women whose lives were a complete shambles, spiritually speaking...but they came to Christ and were dramatically rescued...
 - what Elizabeth said about her physical trial can equally be said spiritually of any person who comes to Christ in repentance and faith...**Luke 1:25 - 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.**
- we refer to this theologically as the doctrine of justification...it's a legal term...it means, to be made and declared righteous...
 - **2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**
 - **Romans 5:1-2 - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.**
- there's a beautiful story that illustrates this concept in the OT book of Zechariah...
 - **Zechariah 3:1-5 - Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by.**
- [develop Stewardship Celebration this past Sunday – pictures of hundreds of men and women who have come to Christ, many just this year...and their story would be that because of their acceptance of the promises of God regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ, they have now been delivered from disgrace and shame...
 - the way they view themselves is entirely different than before...
 - The Savior whose birth we celebrate at Christmastime has "taken away their disgrace from among men..."
- here's my question for you – has there been a definite time in your life when you made that decision?

2. If you know Christ

a. But have been disappointed

- I would not be surprised if there are many people here in a situation very similar to Zacharias and Elizabeth's...
- I'm not talking about infertility, per se...but something you really hoped would happen, hasn't happened yet...
- now, I need to be very careful here...but just because it hasn't happened, doesn't mean it can't happen...
 - and why do we need to be careful?...unless it is specifically promised in Scripture...we can't take the position that we know something is going to come to pass...but it might...
 - for example – a loved one coming to the Lord...

- now, what about the person who knows Christ...

b. But have failed in some way

- friend – please hear me on this – God does not want you to continue to look in the mirror and see yourself through the lens of your shame...
- **Psalm 103:12 - As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.**

- one of the reasons that is so important is because the lie of the devil is – since I failed in that area before, there's no reason to try to please God today...
- all He sees when He looks at me is a failure anyway, what's the use?

- it's time for you to appropriate Elizabeth's words in a spiritual fashion...

- **Luke 1:25 - 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.**

IV. God Delights in Fulfilling Promises that Often Seem Impossible

- John the Baptist was born...
- Luke explains that at the end of the passage...
- and it's somewhat humorous...because all the ladies are getting together to decide on a name...
- and remember the angel told Zacharias to name their son John...
- so he had told Elizabeth that, with the tablet they were using because of his little speaking problem...
- and the ladies were saying --- no, you don't have anyone in your family named John...
- and he asked for the tablet again and he said – “His name is John”...
 - in other words – I'm not making that mistake again...
 - if the angel said it – I'm believing it and following it...
 - and it was at that moment that his tongue was loosed and he was able to speak again...
- God removed his disgrace as well...