



## Disrupted Disgrace

### Luke 1:4-25

“The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.”

I love how the gospel of Luke begins. It begins with an aged godly man praying. I have shared with some of you that I grew up in a little Canadian village and one of the most powerful images in my mind was a godly elderly man by the name of Morris Wright, a house builder, who was quiet but when he got up to pray, you knew that he knew God. As a teenager, I would make my way to Wednesday night prayer meeting so I could hear him pray.

This is one of those texts where I wish I could read the very words of Zacharias' prayer. But, I do know this. It was at a time when God had seemed to have gone silent and there was a great spiritual dryness, a barrenness that had come across the land of Israel. This was a godly man living in difficult times with his godly and devout wife, waiting for God to act.

*“We as Evangelicals need many things: we need wisdom for the public square, we need more attention to ecclesiology and ongoing passion for missions, we need to recapture our unity in Christ, but most of all we need repentance and revival!*

*We need to repent of our sins: of our arrogance and pride, of our hunger for political and ecclesial power and not for holy lives, of our grieving the Holy Spirit, of our bickering and slandering one another, of our fascination with gossip fed by social media, of our passion for lesser things at the expense of love for Christ and love for the lost and love for the Church. We need to repent of our prayerlessness and our trust in the realm of politics.*

*Simply put: we need to know the power of the Spirit of Pentecost that was experienced at Pentecost and again in the 18th and 19th centuries. We desperately need revival.” Michael Haykin, Director of Newton House, Oxford*



**Spiritual breakthroughs begin with repentance.**

**Repentance often begins with broken-hearted prayer.**

**Repentance happens when God reveals to the broken-hearted that He is radically “for us” in Jesus Christ.**

**Repentance is God’s gift to us not our gift to God.**

*“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at this right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:30-31*

*“When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’” Acts 11:18*

The gospel of Luke begins with a devout and sincere elderly man and a woman feeling the pain and disgrace of God’s silence upon the people of Israel.

Luke begins with a call to repentance. Where do you hear that call in your life today?

Where is that place deep in your heart/life where you feel shame, broken, maybe even forsaken of God?

Would you invite God there today?

### **I. Long, Dark, Painful Days of Spiritual Barrenness (Luke 1:5-7)**

“In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.”

**a. These were dark cruel days for the people of Israel politically. Herod was a brutal king.**

“When we read that it was ‘in the days of King Herod,’ a chill should run down our spines. Quite simply, Herod was a monster. He came to power amid a bloodbath with the help of two Roman legions in 37 B.C. He murdered both of his brothers-in-law and his beloved wife Miriamne, as well as her mother. Just before his own death, he ordered that prominent citizens in Israel be gathered together into the hippodrome. The decree was that upon his death they would be executed, so that there would be mourning in Israel.” (M. Card)

**b. These were dark cruel days for Israel spiritually. God seemed brutally silent.**

There is in this scene, a deep longing and devotion, but a simmering sense of hopelessness.

- *“And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.” (Luke 1:10)*
- We have elderly people waiting their whole lives for God to intervene. Who do we know were there? (Simeon – Luke 2:25-35; Anna, “a widow for eighty four years”, Luke 2:36-38)
- Clear connection to Malachi 4:1-4. Israel has been waiting in silence for centuries – “And he will turn hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.”

“Long lay the world in sin and error pining, ‘Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

**c. These were dark cruel days for Zachariah and Elizabeth personally. Infertility was a brutal experience.** There was not just personal pain but public shame.



Barrenness carried with it a long simmering sense of shame. People viewed barrenness as the hand of God being upon you. Even, godly and devout people like Zechariah and Elizabeth lived with an underlying sense of shame.

“In any culture, infertility is an aching disappointment, and for some an almost unbearable stress. But the burden cannot be compared to that borne by childless women in ancient Hebrew culture because barrenness was considered a disgrace, even a punishment.” (R Kent Hughes).

- Zechariah couldn't believe that it was possible personally for him and Elizabeth to have child. “How could this be?”

The atmosphere at the beginning of Luke's gospel is thick with the sense that somehow God had forsaken them.

Is this how you feel today?

## II. The Glorious Disruption: A Glorious New Day of Joy and Repentance.

*“And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.” Luke 1:14*

- a. **Gloriously Disrupted Schedule** – Zachariah was chosen by lot. Clearly, God's hand is to be seen here.

“Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.” (Luke 1:8-9)

“You shall make an altar on which to burn incense...And you shall place it in front of the veil that is above the ark of testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, when I will meet with you. And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular



incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations.” (Exodus 30:1,6-8)

“Zechariah was one of eighteen thousand priests and the offering was the greatest ministry of his priestly career. Given, the number of priests, the offering would take place only once in a priest’s life, and thus this was an incredibly special day in Zechariah’s life.” (Thomas Schreiner)

b. **A Gloriously Disrupted Service** – The angel Gabriel appears as Zechariah was praying by the altar of incense.

- Zechariah is startled and must be calmed.

“The appearance of an angel signifies that the Lord is about to act in a significant way (Judg. 6:21) and seeing an angel is by no means a common occurrence.” (T. Schreiner)

- Gabriel did this with Daniel as well.
  - It was at the time that incense would be offered that Gabriel appeared to Daniel. “While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at first, came to me in swift flight *at the time of the evening sacrifice.*” (Daniel 9:20-21)
  - Daniel’s prayer might give us insight into Zechariah’s prayer. (Daniel 9:4-19)

“Now Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand and made your name renowned as it is this day, we have sinned, and we have acted wickedly. Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, may your anger and wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; for



because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become an object of ridicule to all those around us.” (Daniel 9:15-16)

“Therefore our God hear the prayer and the petitions of your servant. Make your face shine on your desolate sanctuary for the Lord’s sake. Listen closely, my God and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that bears your name. **For we are not presenting our petitions before you based on our righteous acts, but based on your abundant compassion.** Lord hear! Lord forgive! Lord, listen and act! My God for your own sake, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name.” (Daniel 9:17-19)

“While I was praying, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the first vision, reached me in my extreme weariness, about the time of the evening offering...” (Daniel 9:21)

c. **A Gloriously Disrupted Sorrow:** Gabriel announces that John is introducing a glorious new day. People get ready.

*“And you will have joy and gladness, and may will rejoice at his birth.”* (Luke 1:13-17)

“The reference to ‘many’ shows that the joy is not limited to John’s birth but encompasses the effect of his birth, so that his birth refers to the impact of his entire life... John brings joy to those who are humble and admit they are sinners (3:10-14;7:29; 20:6).”

- **The Glorious Disruption of God’s Grace**

*“But the angel said to 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.’* (1:13)



*John means “Yahweh will be gracious”*

**The Glorious Disruption of God’s Presence - This not just of another prophet calling for repentance but this is a prophet announcing the very presence of God Himself.**

“And He will turn many of the children of Israel to the **Lord their God,**” (1:16)

“The ‘Lord their God’ here could be the Father, but since the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, we probably have a reference to Him.” (T. Schreiner)

**The Glorious Disruption of His Power - This not just another period of renewal in Israel’s history but this is the great promised day of Lord coming in power.**

- o John the Baptist will be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. We will be filled with the Holy Spirit from new birth.*
  
- o John the Baptist will call for a period of renewal/repentance in Israel. Jesus will bring about renewal and repentance amongst all peoples as He Himself comes with power!*

“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.” (Luke 1:17)

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. **But for you, who fear the name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.** You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. You shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day, that I act, says the Lord of hosts...Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome



day of the Lord comes. ***And he will turn the hearts*** of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (Malachi 4:1-6)

***The Glorious Disruption of God’s Pleasure – John’s birth will remove the undeserved disgrace of His mother. Jesus will remove the rightful disgrace of all His people.***

“After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden. Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked to me, to take away my reproach among my people.” (Luke 1:24-25)

Repentance and renewal begin when we truly begin to believe this about God:

***John will be great before the Lord. (1:15) We will be greater.***

“I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than He.” (Luke 7:28)

**Four Key Truths You Absolutely Need to Believe Today:**

1. God is gracious towards sinners.
2. God is with you through it all.
3. The Battle Belongs to the Lord. Christ’s power is able to do in you far more than you can ask or imagine.
4. God loves you. You are deeply loved.

**The end of Daniel’s prayer of repentance.**

*“At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly loved.” Daniel 9:23*



Illustration: Testimony of David Bennett, a gay man who surrendered his life to Christ when in the power of the Holy Spirit, he truly came to believe that God loved him in Christ.

Illustration: Preaching in Cordoba Mexico. Belen Church. A woman interrupts my sermon weeping. She had been angry with God over the death of her eight year old daughter for 4 years. The women in the church jumped up and swallowed her up in love and acceptance as she wept and confessed her sorrow over anger with God as we told our testimony of God's grace in grief.