

Message #3

Luke 1:5-10

One of the most amazing criminal investigation stories of our lifetime is this capture of the Golden State Killer. He committed murders and rapes from the late 70's and then stopped in 1986. He is now 72 years old and they got him. The way they got him is fascinating. Someone in his family did one of those ancestry DNA saliva tests and the police were able to track the DNA to that family and then from there track it to the killer himself. It is fantastic what the police were able to do with DNA some 30 plus years later.

Before DNA evidence was in existence, there is an ancestry of a family that actually traced more than 400 offspring. In this family line are 14 College Presidents; 100 College Professors; 100 Ministers, Missionaries and Theological Teachers. Another 100 are Lawyers and 60 are Doctors. Also some distant relatives have been traced and 60 have been authors and editors.

That is one amazing ancestry lineage. Now of course the question that comes to mind when reading an ancestry like this is whose ancestry is this? This is all the ancestry of one of the most famous Bible Teachers, theologians and preachers to ever live. This is the ancestry of Jonathan Edwards. He married in 1726 and out of that marriage came this amazing offspring that God truly did bless.

Now generally speaking, when we see someone truly blessed of God and greatly used by God, there is some Grandfather or Grandmother or Father or Mother who was very instrumental to it. That point is certainly proved by the life of Jonathan Edwards, and it is also clearly proved by **John, the Forerunner of Jesus Christ.**

Doctor Luke was an ancestry research guy. He didn't have access to DNA, but he did have access to family members and eyewitnesses and he certainly had access to the Old Testament. In the last book of the O.T., Malachi, there was a prophetic prediction that promised before the Messiah would come on the scene, one would come before Him to announce Him to Israel. Malachi said this: "Behold I am going to send My messenger and he will clear the way before Me" (Malachi 3:1). **This prediction is a direct prediction of John, the forerunner of Jesus Christ!**

Luke knew about this prediction and he knew about John, but what Luke specifically wanted to know something about was John's parents. Apparently as Luke began his research, he wondered of all the people in Israel, why would God select Zacharias and Elizabeth to be the parents of John? Luke wanted to know what kind of people they were, who would be singled out by God to produce the forerunner of Jesus Christ. **Luke wanted to know facts about John's ancestry.**

He went to work and found the fact and he answered three questions in his research: 1) Why Zacharias? 2) Why Elizabeth? 3) Why now in Israel's history? Luke carefully researched that and what he discovered is data found nowhere else in the Bible. What we see here is this:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY SELECTED A SPECIFIC HUSBAND AND WIFE TO PRODUCE JOHN, THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS CHRIST.

Now the historical events here will never ever again be reduplicated. However, it is possible to in some ways reduplicate the mindset, spirituality and lifestyle of Zacharias and Elizabeth. We too may experience many blessings of God if we follow their example.

Now as Luke did his ancestry research, he was led by God to stumble upon and record six key ancestry facts:

ANCESTRY FACT #1 – John’s parents lived in the “days of Herod.” 1:5a

Zacharias and Elizabeth lived “in the days of Herod.” This Herod was Herod the Great, who ruled all Palestine from B.C. 37 to B.C. 4. Herod had been appointed by Mark Antony and Caesar Augustus.

Herod was hated by the Jews because he was a Jew who was intimately connected to Rome. In fact, he would track down any Jew who spoke against Rome and at times would have them executed. He was like a Robin Hood in reverse. He would take money from the poor Jews and give it to the rich Romans.

He was so detested by the Jews that he became paranoid that people were out to kill him. Josephus claims he would dress up as a common person and walk through the streets just to hear what people were saying about him. He ended up killing his 1) Brother-in-law; 2) Wife’s Uncle; 3) Wife; 4) Mother-in-law; 5) Three of his own sons.

When Herod got wind of the fact that possibly a new king had been born in Bethlehem, he ordered all babies to be executed (Matt. 2:16). He was a godless, wicked man. Dr. Merrill Unger said, “...he was a heathen in practice and a monster in character” (*The New Ungers Bible Dictionary*, p. 556).

This was the historical and political environment in which Zacharias and Elizabeth lived. It was in this very environment where John and Jesus were born. **What we learn from this is that we may live in a world that is politically and morally corrupt and evil and still be the recipient of the great blessings of God.** God works in the midst of human history even when it is wicked.

Our environment or circumstances will never be an excuse for not being godly. If Zacharias and Elizabeth could be godly in their world, we sure can in our world. We don’t have to go along with the crowd. We can be godly in a job, a school, a home or neighborhood.

ANCESTRY FACT #2 – John’s parents both came from a priestly lineage. 1:5b

Zacharias was of the “division of Abijah.” Abijah was a descendant of Aaron. During the days when David reigned as King, he organized the priesthood into 24 divisions.

The 8th division was that of Abijah (I Chron. 24:10). Each division was responsible to serve two weeks a year in the temple. At the time of John and Jesus, the temple was operating this way.

Elizabeth was “from the daughters of Aaron.” What that means is that she was the daughter of a priest. According to Jewish law, a priest was required to marry a Jewish virgin girl (Lev. 21:13-15). She did not have to be the daughter of a priest, but she did have to be Jewish.

However, according to Jewish thinking, if a priest did marry a priest’s daughter, it was considered to be a double honor. What we learn here is that both of John’s parents had a priestly lineage.

According to I Peter 2:9-10, any person who has trusted Christ as Savior is a royal priest unto God, and is part of the royal priesthood. What that practically means is that if you are a believer, you are in the family line of one God will bless. God only blesses those in His family.

What is interesting here is that Luke does not begin by blasting the evil political world or power crazed Herod; he focuses on two humble, quiet, faithful people of God.

ANCESTRY FACT #3 – John’s parents both had a godly character. **1:6**

Luke is very careful to point out that “both” Zacharias and Elizabeth were godly. As Trent Butler said, they had “impeccable priestly and religious credentials” (*Luke*, p. 7). These two were very godly people. They were not perfect, but they were godly. Now often in a marriage, you will have one who is really godly and one who isn’t. That was not the case here.

This is important to see that both were godly. **It is possible to be priestly in lineage but not godly in lifestyle. But it is not possible to receive God’s great blessings without a godly lifestyle.**

Luke specifically mentions two aspects of their godliness:

Aspect #1 - Both were righteous in God’s sight. **1:6a**

Both governed their lives in conformity to the righteous standards of God. They offered proper animal sacrifices for their sins and they governed themselves in a right way. They were righteous before God. This is where it really matters. Not just before people, but God.

Aspect #2 - Both were blameless in obeying God’s Word. **1:6b**

The word “blameless” is not the word sinless, but it is a word that does mean they governed their lives free from fault when it came to the Word of God.

They were never in constant rebellion against God and His Word. As a wife, Elizabeth conformed herself to God’s Word and as a husband so did Zacharias.

ANCESTRY FACT #4 – John’s parents had a childless marriage. **1:7**

Even though Zacharias and Elizabeth were godly, they still faced their share of hardships. Keep in mind that these two are godly people with impeccable credentials. But that does not mean you always get everything you want in life. They had always wanted a child, but God had not seen fit to give them one. Their childlessness was certainly not due to some punishment for sin (Deut. 7:14).

It is interesting to me that Dr. Luke says they had no “child.” The word for “child” (τεκνον) is gender neutral. They didn’t care if they had a boy or girl. They had always wanted a child. In fact, Elizabeth was actually mocked because she had never had a baby (Luke 1:25).

Every Jewish woman wanted to give birth to a baby boy for three reasons:

(Reason #1) - Because it was possible that the baby could be the Messiah.

Every Jewish woman dreamed of giving birth to the Messiah, who would be the ultimate son.

(Reason #2) - Because being barren was considered to be a punishment by God (Lev. 20:20-21; Jer. 22:30).

There was a religious stigma to this. In our day, this does not contain the stigma that it did in John’s day. In fact, in our day many don’t want a baby and will abort one if it is discovered one is pregnant.

(Reason #3) - Because being barren was considered to be a lack of God’s blessings (Gen. 1:28; Deut. 7:14; Ps. 127:3-5; 128:4-6).

Again, in our day many think it is a blessing not to have children.

In **verse 7**, Luke presents two biological realities that only a medical doctor would observe:

Biological Reality #1 - Elizabeth was sterile. **1:7a**

The word “barren” (στειρα) is the Greek word from which we get our English word “sterile.” It is a word that means one is physically incapable of having a baby. It is possible that Elizabeth had been medically tested.

Dr. Luke would have known of the brilliant Greek doctor Hippocrates of Cos (460-377 B.C.). In fact, there are what is called the Hippocratic Medical Greek Texts that Luke would have studied. In those texts are ten articles on gynecology. It is clear that medical observations and studies were being made on the subject of sterility (Rebecca Flemming, *The Invention of Infertility in the Classical Greek World*, pp. 2-3). It is very plausible that Elizabeth had seen a doctor and the doctor determined she was sterile.

Just because you love the Lord, does not mean you don't have some medical problems. Obviously that was the case for Elizabeth. Now in this Grace Age, one wonderful blessing comes from one who is sterile and that is the blessing of adoption.

Biological Reality #2 - Zacharias and Elizabeth were both old. **1:7b**

Now according to medical science, a husband and wife who are over 40 only have a 5% chance of getting pregnant. Zacharias and Elizabeth were way beyond that. In fact, "they were both advanced in years" which means they were both very old.

Truth is age is no barrier to God. In fact, in the history of Israel, there have been many who fell into this category who had a baby: Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. They gave birth to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and all of them were old when they did it.

ANCESTRY FACT #5 – John's father was a faithful minister. **1:8-9**

In these verses we learn a great deal about Zacharias. He may have been old, but he was still serving God. Old age did not stop him from serving God.

Verse 8 says that it was the division of Abijah's turn to serve in the Temple. Two weeks out of the year, it was the division of Abijah's turn to minister in the Temple. Zacharias was performing his ministry as he had so faithfully done for many years.

According to **verse 9**, something extremely unique happened. Zacharias had been selected by a casting of lots among the priests to enter the Temple to burn the incense. This was done in the Holy Place and it was done twice a day (Ex. 30:7-8). In the O.T., lots were cast to determine God's sovereignty on a matter (Prov. 16:33).

It is estimated that there were a total of 18,000-20,000 priests. What that means is that most of the priests would never get this privilege of entering the Holy Place in their entire lifetime. This certainly would have been the highlight of Zacharias' life and ministry. He had served God faithfully for many years and now finally he won the Temple lottery to be able to go into the Holy Place and offer the incense offering.

This offering was very important to God. It was representative of the prayers offered to the Lord (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8). It seems to have been closely connected with a corporate acknowledgment of sin. In fact, it was very closely connected to being a prayer of atonement (Ex. 30:1-10; Num. 16:36-40).

When this lottery was won by Zacharias, I am certain he thought this is the highlight of my career. This is the ultimate blessing of God. What he did not know is that his greatest blessing was yet to come.

No matter what our age, we need to faithfully serve God because it is possible the greatest blessings of God are yet to come.

ANCESTRY FACT #6 – John’s nation was in continual prayer. **1:10**

Verse 10 is a very significant verse. What this means is that many from the nation Israel were outside in the court area praying to God while Zacharias was inside in the Holy Place offering incense to God.

There is no question that God does do powerful things when His people pray.

Now Luke was a scholarly medical doctor, who is fact-oriented. But he obviously knew of the importance of prayer. In fact, this very gospel stresses prayer as being a critical part of seeing God do some wonderful things:

- 1) Jesus was praying when God spoke from heaven. 3:21-22
- 2) Jesus was praying before choosing the twelve. 6:12-13
- 3) Jesus was praying before He was transfigured. 9:28-29
- 4) Jesus was praying before He faced His crucifixion. 22:41-43

God’s people were praying before an angel appeared to Zacharias.

Luke realized that prayer is a critical key to God’s power. A praying church will tap into the power of God. A praying church will do a work for God. A praying church will be blessed by God.

Perhaps your life has been sterile lately. Perhaps you are an old, tired believer who hasn’t had life go the way you wish it would have gone. Stay faithful, stay focused and keep praying; your greatest blessings may be just ahead.