

FBC POWELL, 1-15-17 PM NOTES
"How to Respond to a Pronouncement from God"
Luke 1:18-38
#2 in Series, "The Gospel According to Luke"

Malachi 4:2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

Romans 10:2-3 "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."

Luke 1:17 "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him [the Messiah] 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."

I. The Wrong Way to Respond to a Proclamation from God (v. 8-25)

A. The Angel's Astonishment (v. 18-20)

B. The Angel's Accuracy (v. 21-25)

II. The Right Way to Respond to a Proclamation from God (v. 26-38)

John 1:45-46a "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'"

"Nazareth, a shoddy, corrupt halfway stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon, [that] was overrun by Gentiles and Roman Soldiers... It was miserably corrupt. By consensus, Nazareth was not much." - R. Kent Hughes

"From all indicators, her life would not be extraordinary. She would marry humbly, give birth to numerous poor children, never travel farther than a few miles from home, and one day die like thousands of others before her – a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere. As we probe this beautiful text of the Annunciation we cannot miss an inescapable fact: *the greatest news ever proclaimed in Israel came to the humblest of its people!* Mary said exactly that in her *Magnificat* when she sang, 'My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble estate of His servant'" - R. Kent Hughes

“It is a well known fact that the Roman Catholic Church pays an honor to the Virgin Mary, hardly inferior to that which it pays to her blessed Son. She is formally declared by the Roman Catholic Church to have been ‘conceived without sin.’ She is held up to Roman Catholics as an object of worship, and prayed to as a mediator between God and man, no less powerful than Christ Himself. For all this, be it remembered, there is not the slightest warrant in Scripture. There is no warrant in the verses before us now. There is no warrant in any other part of God’s word.

But while we say this, we must in fairness admit, that no woman was ever so highly honored as the mother of our Lord. It is evident that one woman only out of the countless millions of the human race, could be the means whereby God could be ‘manifest in the flesh,’ and the Virgin Mary had the mighty privilege of being that one. By one woman, sin and death were brought into the world at the beginning. By the child-bearing of one woman, life and immortality were brought to light when Christ was born. No wonder this one woman was called ‘highly favored’ and ‘blessed.’” - Dr. J. C. Ryle

A. The Angel’s Decent (V26-29)

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.” - Rheims–Douai Bible

B. The Angel’s Disclosure (v. 30-38)

1. The Revelation (v. 30-33)

2. The Ramification (v. 34-37)

Luke 1:18 “How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.”

Genesis 1:2 “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”

“There is no sin too black and bad to be pardoned. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. There is no heart too hard and wicked to be changed. The heart of stone can be made a heart of flesh. There is no work too hard for a believer to do. We may do all things through Christ strengthening us. There is no trial too hard to be borne. The grace of God is sufficient for us. There is no promise too great to be fulfilled. Christ’s words never pass away, and what He has promised, He is able to perform. There is no difficulty too great for a believer to overcome. When God is for us, who shall be against us?”

- J. C. Ryle

Conclusion (v. 38)

First Baptist Church Powell 01 15 2017 PM

Sermon 2: How to Respond to a Pronouncement from God

Luke 1:18-38

When the events of Luke 1:5-17 took place, Israel had experienced 400 years of spiritual darkness when there was no word from God. During those spiritually dark days, there was a remnant of faithful believers who still had hope that the promised Messiah would come. Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, had prophesied of the Messiah’s coming in Malachi 4:2: “But for you who fear My name, the

sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.” The Old Testament ended with the joyful promise that the sun of righteousness (referring to the light giving Messiah) would come and dispense the spiritual darkness that engulfed the land with the light of His truth.

During these 400 years of darkness without God’s prevailing truth, Judaism had sunk into a sewer of legalism. Most of the religious leaders had abandoned salvation by grace alone through faith alone and taught that salvation was earned by keeping the law and often the hundreds of regulations added to the Law. Judaism had become nothing more than empty ritualism that was impotent to save. The Apostle Paul summarized the sad state of Judaism in Romans 10:2-3: “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”

A part of Malachi’s prophesy at the end of the Old Testament was that God would send a messenger or a forerunner to go before the promised Messiah to prepare the way for Him. Luke begins his Gospel with the introduction of that forerunner. After an introduction to the book in verses 1-4 (called the prologue), Luke introduces us to the father and mother of this one who was the promised forerunner. The father and mother of this forerunner to the Messiah was a little known Jewish priest named Zacharias, and his wife, named Elizabeth. In our previous study, we saw that an angel named Gabriel appeared to Zacharias in the temple and told him that even though he and his wife were past childbearing years, they would have a son that they were to name John. In Luke 1:17 we read what the angel said of this miracle son, “It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him [the Messiah] 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.”

That brings us up to the verses we are going to focus on in this message.

I. The Wrong Way to Respond to a Proclamation from God (v 18-25)

The angel Gabriel communicated a proclamation (a formal announcement) from God to Zacharias. Though Zacharias was a godly man, he serves as a model of how we should not respond to an angel! Instead of receiving the proclamation with joy and gratitude, Zacharias responded with unbelief.

A. The Angel’s Astonishment (v 18-20)

Gabriel seems to be astonished that his message would be doubted. He reminds Zacharias that he is the angel who stands in the very presence of God. He is one of only two angels who have their name revealed to us. The other is Michael. By standing in the presence of God, Gabriel knew the power of God to do all that He says He will do. In the other recorded appearances of Gabriel, there is no one who ever doubted his word. Gabriel knew firsthand about the birth of Isaac when his father and mother were past childbearing age. Gabriel knew that God is the same, and if he says that Zacharias and Elizabeth will have a son, they will have a son! It is really incredible that any Christian would doubt a single promise or pronouncement from God.

In verse 18 Zacharias asked for a sign that what the angel said was indeed true. He was given a sign, but it was not what Zacharias had in mind. Verse 20 tells us that the sign was that he would be mute (unable to speak) until the proclamation came to pass. Zacharias tongue that uttered unbelief was now stricken speechless. There were nine months of silence for him to meditate on the consequences of responding to God in unbelief. Few sins seem to provoke God as does the sin of unbelief. In a sense, unbelief is implying if not downright declaring that God is a liar. This unbelief seems to be a temporary lapse and not a pattern of Zacharias’ life.

B. The Angel’s Accuracy (v 21-25)

Normally the priest who burned the incense came out quickly. While it was the thrill of a lifetime to be chosen to go into the holy place and offer the incense, there was also the fear of God’s holiness. After all, two sons of Aaron (Nadab and Abihu) had disregarded the holiness of these duties, and the Lord killed them (Leviticus 10). The priest usually offered the incense and got out quickly lest they too would be

consumed by the fire. When Zacharias finally came out and was unable to speak, the people knew that he had some kind of vision. What Gabriel said about the sign to Zacharias came to pass exactly like he said it would and just as God had proclaimed through Gabriel, Elizabeth did conceive and gave birth to a son.

Listen to the excitement in Elizabeth's voice as she says in 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." Zacharias and Elizabeth were flawed, but genuine believers. This is the account of the conception of the promised forerunner, who we now know was named John.

II. The Right Way to Respond to a Proclamation from God (v 26-38)

This passage is often called "the annunciation." That means the announcement. It refers to this same angel (Gabriel) who announced to Mary that she would have a son who, in reality, was the Son of God. In this passage, we have the announcement of one of the most wonderful events in the history of the world – the incarnation of the Son of God. Every word in this passage is so very important. Let's spend some time on some background of Gabriel's announcement to Mary. One of the most amazing things is that God chose an unknown young woman in an insignificant town to bring the Son of God into the world in human flesh. Nazareth was located in Galilee which was about 75-100 miles north of Jerusalem. We see the reputation of Nazareth in the response of Nathanael in John 1:45-46a: "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'"

Nazareth was not even mentioned in the Old Testament. One commentator describes Nazareth this way, "Nazareth, a shoddy, corrupt halfway stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon, [that] was overrun by Gentiles and Roman Soldiers... It was miserably corrupt. By consensus, Nazareth was not much." [R. Kent Hughes, *Luke, Volume One*, page 29]

Let's meet the woman that God chose to bear His Son who would be the Savior of the world. Verse 27 tells us that the woman's name was Mary. She was a virgin (one who had never had sexual relations with a man) who was "engaged" to a man named Joseph. The word "engaged" could more literally be translated "betrothed." The betrothal was somewhat similar to our custom of engagement, but involved a much greater commitment. The betrothal was a binding legal arrangement that required a divorce or death to break it. If the man a woman was betrothed to died, she was considered a widow. During the betrothal, the couple did not live together and did not have sexual relations. Mary was likely very young. Based on customs of the time, she could have been as young as twelve or thirteen and as old eighteen or nineteen. If we say sixteen years old, we would probably not be far from her age. Mary is living with her parents in Nazareth waiting with anticipation for the day of her wedding to Joseph.

Joseph (as well as Mary) was a descendent of Israel's greatest King – David. That fact is important because the Old Testament prophesies are clear that the Messiah, the Deliverer would be a descendent of David. In the world's eyes, Mary was a "nobody." Kent Hughes says it well. "

From all indicators, her life would not be extraordinary. She would marry humbly, give birth to numerous poor children, never travel farther than a few miles from home, and one day die like thousands of others before her – a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere. As we probe this beautiful text of the Annunciation we cannot miss an inescapable fact: *the greatest news ever proclaimed in Israel came to the humblest of its people!* Mary said exactly that in her *Magnificat* when she sang, 'My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble estate of His servant.' [R. Kent Hughes, *Luke, Volume One*, page 30]

Let me take a few minutes to deal with something that grieves me. When we see what many have done with this godly young woman, it is sad. Much of the church today venerates Mary to a level that has absolutely no biblical justification. But something else bothers me. There are many people so anxious to refute the worship given to Mary that they miss what an amazing woman she was and the honor she should hold as the human mother of our Lord. She was a truly godly young woman. The Anglican Bible Scholar, Dr. J. C. Ryle, (1816-1900) gives a balanced view that we need to hear.

It is a well known fact that the Roman Catholic Church pays an honor to the Virgin Mary, hardly inferior to that which it pays to her blessed Son. She is formally declared by the Roman Catholic Church to have been ‘conceived without sin.’ She is held up to Roman Catholics as an object of worship, and prayed to as a mediator between God and man, no less powerful than Christ Himself. For all this, be it remembered, there is not the slightest warrant in Scripture. There is no warrant in the verses before us now. There is no warrant in any other part of God’s word.

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[Dr. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Volume Two*, page 23]

A. The Angel’s Decent (v 26-29)

Just six months after the angel Gabriel’s appearance to Zacharias, he appears to Mary. This must have been scary to a teenage girl. That would explain why Gabriel addresses Mary as, “favored one” in verse 28. It would be a mistake to only focus on the widespread false teaching that has sprung up out of this passage, but we must at least mention it since it affects the millions who identify themselves as Roman Catholics.

A part of the controversy is the way verse 28 should be translated. Let me give you several trusted English translations of verse 28b.

The NASB and ESV renders it, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

The HCSB renders it, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.”

The KJV is, “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”

The NIV is, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

The Roman Catholic translation (*Douai Version or sometimes called Rheims–Douai Bible*) says “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”

It is from this translation the familiar Roman Catholic prayer comes that is called the Ave Maria that begins with “Hail Mary.” The problem is the phrase “full of grace.” It is interpreted by many Roman Catholics as meaning that Mary has been granted and possess fullness of grace, which she dispenses to others.

Pope Pius X (1903-1913) said that Mary was not the recipient of Grace, but the dispenser “of all the gifts that our Savior purchased for us by His death and by His blood; the supreme Minister of the distribution of graces; the distributor ... of the treasures of His merits.” There is absolutely no justification for that interpretation from Luke 1:28. A leading Roman Catholic scholar, Ludwig Ott writes, “Since Mary’s Assumption into Heaven no grace is conferred on man without her actual intercessory co-operation. [Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, page 209] This is nothing less than the deification of Mary – making her deity. That is dangerous.

What is the meaning of that phrase “favored one” in Luke 1:28? Think of the context. Remember that Mary was likely a teenager. Remember that when Zacharias, an elderly Jewish Priest saw this angelic being the Bible says in Luke 1:12: “Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him.” How do you think a poor teenage girl would feel in Gabriel’s presence? Gabriel’s greeting was simply an assurance that Mary had nothing to fear. Of all the women who ever lived, she was chosen by God to bear the Messiah. She was indeed the “favored one.” Even with Gabriel’s assurances, verse 29 tells us that Mary was still very perplexed (“greatly troubled” ESV).

B. The Angel’s Disclosure (v 30-38)

In these verses, Gabriel gives Mary more information.

1. The Revelation (v 30-33)

Again, Gabriel assures Mary in verse 30 that she has found favor with God – she obviously needed reassurance! This is some heavy, heavy stuff for a teenage girl. The gracious work of God in her was that she was going to conceive a son. This dumbfounded Mary because she knew that there was only one way that could happen. This son that the peasant girl would conceive was not just any son. His name, Jesus: meant “God saves.” Gabriel also says that He will be the Son of the Most High and eventually reign on the throne of David. His rule will not be a temporal rule that lasts perhaps several decades; His rule and kingdom would have no end. His rule would be throughout eternity. This was a lot for Mary to take in!

2. The Ramification (v 34-37)

When you read verse 34, you may wonder why Zacharias questioned Gabriel’s proclamation from God and was made mute (unable to speak) and Gabriel answers Mary’s question. There is a difference. Zacharias responded in unbelief. Luke 1:18: “How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.” Zacharias was saying “There is no way that can happen.” Mary was not questioning if what Gabriel said would happen, she just didn’t know how it would happen. Zacharias says “How can I know this?” and Mary says “How can this be.” Zacharias asks for more evidence while Mary asked for an explanation. Zacharias says he can’t be sure, but Mary says she can’t understand [From a John Piper Sermon, *How Not to Talk to an Angel*] The bottom line is that Mary believed it would happen; she was concerned with how it would happen since she and Joseph were not married. She was asking a biological question.

Verse 35 is Gabriel’s answer to Mary’s question. This verse is dealing with the virgin birth. It should be handled with reverence. There is a mystery here. We will never know the details and all of the mechanics and that is okay. Because we have an all knowing and all powerful God, we need to be comfortable with mysteries that we cannot figure out. Evelyn Underhill said, “The god who is so small he can be completely understood is too small to be worshipped.” Having given that warning, let us look at just what the text says.

There are no sexual overtones in verse 35. The word translated “overshadow” was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to describe God’s presence in the sanctuary. In the New Testament it was used to describe God’s presence at the transfiguration when the glory cloud descended on the three disciples. Here is what we know. The Holy Spirit who was the agent in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2 “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”). In some mysterious way that we cannot comprehend, the same Spirit of God was overshadowing Mary, doing a creative work so that the baby in her womb would be the eternal Son of God taking on human flesh.

In verse 36, Elizabeth would be a sign to Mary (even though she did not demand a sign). In verse 37 Gabriel makes a statement that he has no doubts about. With God, nothing is impossible. He served in the presence of God and this was an established fact that he had no doubts about. We must not move too quickly over verse 37. Allow me to once again quote J. C. Ryle in his response to this verse:

There is no sin too black and bad to be pardoned. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. There is no heart too hard and wicked to be changed. The heart of stone can be made a heart of flesh. There is no work too hard for a believer to do. We may do all things through Christ strengthening us. There is no trial too hard to be borne. The grace of God is sufficient for us. There is no promise too great to be fulfilled. Christ’s words never pass away, and what He has promised, He is able to perform. There is no difficulty too great for a believer to overcome. When God is for us, who shall be against us?

J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Volume Two*, page 28-29]

Nothing will be impossible with God!

Conclusion (v 38)

This verse is one of the greatest statements of faith in the Bible! May we all learn from Mary's surrender. We don't worship her, but we should seek to follow her example.