

## Hope is Here

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Week 1: Hope in the Waiting (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80)

- Man, did anyone else just get hit with the reality that it's December already this week?!
  - You guys all get your Christmas decorations up? I know that some of you psychopaths have had them up since Halloween! Haha
  - Now we waited a little longer than we'd have like to this year, but we got all of our Christmas decorations up and our decorating tradition got spread out over a couple of days this year, but our tradition is to get new Christmas mugs, get all the decorations up while listening to Christmas music, and then watch a Christmas movie and eat popcorn and drink out of our mugs
- And we were about to watch a movie when me and Fletcher had our first run in over the meaning of Christmas

- I don't remember how exactly it came up, but I for some reason said, "Yeah, Christmas is about Jesus."
  - And then Fletcher goes, "Nooooo, Santa!"
  - And I said, "Nooooo, Jesus!"
  - I got no problem arguing with a 3 year old.
- But you know, it can be really easy for us to get caught up in the customs and chaos of the holidays that we forget what this season is all about.
  - We have plans to make, groceries to get, gift lists a mile long, so many things stack up on the schedule that we can very easily not take the time to focus our minds and our spirits on what this season is all about.
- That is why I always want to do a Christmas series throughout the month of December, because I think it is very important and powerful to intentionally focus on the Christmas story and the Hope that Jesus brings.

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- And because He came then, Hope is here now!
- And you may not realize this, but the Christmas story actually doesn't begin with the Birth of Jesus. It actually begin with the birth of His cousin, John.
- If you look with me in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 5, Luke writes:
  - ***"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."* -Luke 1:5-7 (ESV)**
- So Zechariah and Elizabeth were in the ministry. Zechariah was a sort of Pastor to the

people of Israel and they were both really good people doing things the right way.

- They lived such good lives that there was nothing but good things to say about them.
- But they had no children. And in that time and that culture normally if a couple would go childless it was thought to be because God was punishing them for something.
- So it didn't make any sense that a couple who was seen as nothing but righteous and blameless wouldn't be able to have their own baby.
- And for years and years, ever since they had gotten married they had prayed countless prayers for God to bless them with a child, and that prayer doesn't seem to have been answered, because now they are wayyyy past the age of physically being able to have children.
  - So even though they are living good lives, and doing great things, there is still this sadness that overhangs their house, because

one of their deepest desired has gone unfulfilled.

- However, even with that sadness and confusion, they still chose to live faithful lives.
- You see, how you live, will show where your hope is.
- Zechariah and Elizabeth didn't get what they had been praying for! How many people have we known, or how many of us had been at the spot where we just throw our hands up and say "What's the point?!"
  - God's not listening!
  - He doesn't care!
  - So I don't care anymore, I'm not praying any more, I'm not serving Him anymore...
  - But that's not Zechariah and Elizabeth. No, even though their childlessness has brought them sadness, effected the way the culture saw them, and put an end to their family line. They still served the Lord faithfully.

- Because you know, things don't have to be going right in order to live right.
  - It's actually living the right way when everything seems to be going wrong and against you that will develop your character and grow you the most.
  - And living in that way will be such a testimony to the people and world around you to the point that you can be described the way that they were by their community.
  - Also, living faithful lives in the midst of difficulty will always set you up for incredible blessing.
- One day, Zechariah goes to work and verse 8 says, ***"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. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense."***  
***-Luke 1:8-10 (ESV)***

- Now, this was a once in a lifetime opportunity. It was one of the highest honors that a priest could ever have, to be able to burn incense in the Holy Place of the Temple.
- It was such a sacred ritual that they would determine who went in by lot, in order to determine who would be chosen to burn the incense on any given day so that it would not be man choosing who would go in.
  - The practice of casting lots or choosing by lot was in many cases the cultural equivalent of drawing a name out of a hat.
  - Here in the temple it was a much more dramatic process, that I won't take you through step by step, but essentially out of the 100 or so priests that were serving in the temple that week, one man would be chosen to go burn the incense.
  - If you had been selected in the past you were ineligible to go in again because it was so sacred you could only do it once per lifetime.
- But this is how rare of an opportunity this is.
  - Each priestly division, which consists of most likely 700-800 priests would only have temple duty for one week at a time, twice a year.
  - Of those 700-800 priests, only 50-100 of them would actually be serving on any of the given days of that week.
  - And of those, only 1 per day would be chosen by lot to burn the incense.
  - And on this day, Zechariah happened to be that one.
- So, Zechariah was given the incense, he goes to pray outside the Holy place to prepare himself to go in.
  - He enters, and goes before the altar, places the incense on the burning coals
  - A thick cloud of smoke fills the room that symbolizes the prayers of the people to God.
    - Then he begins to pray a prayer for Israel

- He would pray for The Redemption of Israel, God's Mercy over Israel, for the coming of the Messiah, Forgiveness for the people of Israel, and for God's blessings over the nation
- While he would be praying that in the Holy Place all of the rest of the Priests were praying outside in the courtyard
- And as he is faithfully fulfilling all of these duties in his once-in-a-lifetime experience, verse 8 goes on to say:
  - ***And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.***  
***-Luke 1:11-12 (ESV)***
- Now, normally when we think about this scene of an angelic encounter we think of it as a very sweet and cute moment.
- We picture the child stories of the long flowing gold hair with a shining aura and maybe some wings and rosy red cheeks.
- However, that would not cause Zechariah to be troubled, or for fear to fall upon him.
- Now, this is the angel Gabriel, as we are told here in a bit, and this is not the first time Scripture has a Gabriel encounter. Daniel had a run in with Gabriel about 530 years earlier.
- And when Daniel had his encounter, this is how he described it: ***"I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people. ... So I was left there all alone to see this amazing vision. My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak. Then I heard the man speak, and when I heard the sound of his***

***voice, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground.” -Daniel 10:5-9 (NLT)***

- So yea, THIS is why Zechariah was troubled. THIS is why fear fell upon him....but verse 8 goes on to say:
- ***“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. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,” -Luke 1:13-14 (ESV)***
- You know, sometimes God has a way of answering our prayers outside of our expectation.
- Whenever Zechariah and Elizabeth would have prayed for a baby, they had in their minds what that new growing family would look like!
  - They would still be young, they would take the baby on trips, they would have had all of these new young parent plans!

- But now, much later than he anticipated, Zechariah is being told that his prayer has been answered!
- He could have been thinking, “Really? Now? I’m an old man now! Why couldn’t have you answered this prayer when I was still young enough to be around to see grandkids at least!
- But God has a plan.
  - He specifically chose Zechariah and Elizabeth to be the parents of the greatest prophet who would ever live.
  - He trusted their character enough to raise this son who would be the forerunner of Jesus and prepare the people’s hearts for when their Messiah would arrive on the scene
  - This birth needed to be overly miraculous because God was wanting to do overly great works through this boy!

**- WE HAVE HOPE IN THE WAITING THAT  
GOD IS PREPARING US FOR SOMETHING**

- When Zechariah and Elizabeth were going through that season of waiting, of seemingly unanswered prayer, and yet still chose to live consistent and faithful lives to the Lord...God used that to prepare them to be the parents for John the Baptist that they needed to be.
- You may feel like you have been praying and waiting for so long for God to answer a specific request or desire of your heart
  - And God always has an answer for those prayers, and it is either "Yes!" "Not Yet," or "I have a Better Plan"
  - And those later 2, can lead us to some of the most frustrating seasons of our lives
  - Because it's hard to get "Not Yet," and not be constantly asking "WHEN?!"
  - It's hard to get, "I have a better plan," and not be asking, "Well, WHAT IS IT!"

- And in a very fast paced world, it is extremely difficult to wait for those answers or the results.
  - However the promise of Scripture is:
- ***"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."***  
**-Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)**
  - What's interesting is that phrase Wait for the Lord, can also be translated, Hope in the Lord.
  - Waiting on the Lord and Hoping in the Lord are interchangeable here.
- The Word is **Qāwâ: To wait, look for, hope, expect**
  - And this is how your strength is renewed and you do not grow weary in the midst of waiting, confusion, fear, or grief

- It's when the Lord is the object of your waiting, it's the Lord that you are hoping in, not the desired outcome.
- Waiting on the Lord looks like saying, "You know what? Life may not be going the way that I expected it to go, but I'm expecting that God has a plan is going to work out something good."
- Hoping in the Lord says, "I don't understand why things are going the way that they are going, but I'm looking to God to be everything for me that I need Him to be."
- You see, Zechariah and Elizabeth were strong and did not grow weary in doing good, they were described as righteous and blameless because while they wanted children, their hope was not in their ability to be parents, their hope was in following God and waiting on His timing.
  - Their confidence was going to be in God, whether they ever had children or not!
- And you can be in that mindset and be doing well at it, and then not know what to do with yourself whenever the Lord actually does answer your prayer.
- You can be in the waiting season for so long, that you don't even know that to do with yourself whenever you get out of it.
- In the next few verses, the Angel explains all of the great things that God has planned for his soon-to-be son, but Zechariah's response is, ***"How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."***
  - Now you can see how Zechariah is smart here, because he calls himself old but he doesn't call his wife old....no, she's "advanced in years"....nicer touch to that one.
  - How many times do we fail to be thankful for what God is doing or has done, because we're too caught up questioning His methods?



- And it's not just the half-saved Christians that fall into this. Even Zechariah, a righteous and blameless man fell into this as well!
  - He's having this incredible, supernatural encounter, speaking to an angel, and he still has the nerve to ask..."Wait a minute? How do I know that this is even possible??"
- And the lesson that the Angel teaches Zechariah here, we would be wise to learn from.
  - ***And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." -Luke 1:18-20 (ESV)***
  - Sometimes we just need to Be Quiet and Receive
- It may not be what we expected, it may not be happening the way we expected it to, it may not be the timing in which we expected it to happen, but either way when God blesses us we should be thankful and receive it
- *It reminds of back whenever I was in college, I drove a beater.*
- *It was a 2003 Ford Focus, 5 speed. And it became a true beater after I had the accident on the interstate I told you about a few weeks ago.*
- *The hood on it, was shifted up and to the side, but it still latched. It had a large dent caved into the from passenger side, and the door made a very loud screech when opened. The two back windows wouldn't stay up without some help so I had one widow with a map book of Georgia folded up and shoved into it to keep it in place and the other window had two different colors of duct tape holding it up.*

- But the car drove fine, so I was happy with it.
- But one summer I was doing an internship at a church in Columbus, GA and one day I went into the office and the Pastor said, "Give me your keys." So I did. And then it was explained to me that someone within the church had anonymously offered to have the car all fixed up.
- And this bothered me. No one asked me if I wanted my car fixed. I didn't think my car was worth being fixed. This person was going to spend more money on putting that car in the shop than the car was even worth!
- And I was talking to my dad about it, thinking I was being all humble and spiritual saying things like, "They could send so many kids to camp with what they're going to spend on my car, that money could be used for so many better things."
- And my Dad finally interrupted me and said, "Kenny, shut up."
- He said, "Be quiet, don't rob them of a blessing."
- "Those people out of the goodness of their hearts have chosen to bless you in this way, and God is going to bless them for it. So don't take that blessing away from them."
- And that is probably one of the Top 3 lessons I have ever been taught in my life and it will stick with me forever.
- I need to get over myself, not get caught up in my expectations, and in whatever way God chooses to bless me, either directly or through another person, I just need to be quiet, be thankful, and receive it.
  - This is the lesson that Zechariah is being taught as well.
  - And now Zechariah literally had no choice but to be quiet.
  - The Angel literally takes his voice away, and that's when he comes out and is playing

charades with the people trying to tell them everything that just happened.

- What would be even more challenging is that now he has to go home and tell his “Well advanced in years” wife that she is about to get pregnant.
- But Elizabeth’s response is the response that the angel would have liked to have seen from Zechariah.
- A few days later, In verse 25, after she had gotten pregnant the New Living Translation quotes her this way, **“How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”-Luke 1:25 (NLT)**
- It didn’t matter that the timing wasn’t what she expected, in fact, it could be said that the waiting made her even more appreciative of the blessing.
- **WAITING ON THE LORD CAN MAKE US MORE APPRECIATIVE OF THE LORD**

- When the Lord is the object of our hope, if the Lord is the one we are looking to when we are waiting
- Whenever we receive something, we are going to be that much more thankful to Him for His blessings
- However, if a desired object or outcome is what we put our hope in and what we are waiting for, then we’ll never be thankful
  - We’ll just be entitled grumps, complaining to God about how long he made us wait
- Now, I am not the most patient person in the world.
  - I don’t like waiting in lines, I don’t like crowded restaurants, if I’m going to the movies I like it to be a time where the lines will be the shortest so we can go straight into the theater, get the popcorn and go straight into the movie. I even go 15-20 mins after start time so I don’t have to wait through the previews for the movie to start!

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- That's just me!
- But it's funny how whenever I'm having a day with Fletcher, when it's just us two, how much I just don't care about that stuff
- There was one day, were it was just me and Fletch and one of our go to places to eat when it's just us was Sunny Side Cafe over in Mountain View when we used to live over there
- (Best chicken tenders in Hickory, you heard it here first)
- So we get to Sunny Side, and the place is packed, there are people standing outside waiting for a table
  - So my first instinct is, "Nope!"
  - So I say, "Alright bud, lets go eat somewhere else,"
  - Then I start walking back to the car, and he says, "Dahhhhhhd! No!" and he's pointing back to the restaurant saying, "No dad, go eat! No dad, go eat!"
- So we stayed. We put our name in and we waited for a table.
- And I don't even know how long we waited!
  - Normally when I'm waiting for a table at a restaurant, I'm constantly fidgeting, I'm check my watch, looking at every open table wondering what's taking so long!
- But not this time. Didn't have a care in the world, you know why?
  - Because I didn't go to that restaurant to eat food, I went to that restaurant to spend time with my boy.
- You see, whenever we recognize that the primary purpose of our existence is to spend time with God, we will be much more patient and appreciative people.
  - Because we'll realize that we are not living this life in order to have a certain job, make a certain amount of money, marry a specific person, or have a specific amount of kids.

- No, we are living this life primarily for the glory of God and doing life with Him, and when we realize that we can appreciate our jobs more, steward our money better, and be better for our spouse and our kids, and just be appreciative of whatever He chooses to bless us with!
- Scholars believe that Elizabeth would have been anywhere between the ages of 60 and 88. That's a pretty big age range, but I don't know of any SANE woman over the age of 60 that would enjoy being pregnant and giving an all natural birth at that age!
- But yet, her default response was not to complain about the time, but be thankful for the blessing.
- Even if she did complain, this baby is coming whether they like it or not!
- And in verse 57 we read, ***"Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her,***

***and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered." -Luke 1:58-63 (ESV)***

- This would have been very strange in this day and age. Because it was customary for the first born son to take the name of their father, or at least be given a family name.
- *I share this every year, but it reminds me of my Father in Law's family who's great, great, great, great, great, (I don't know how many greats) grandfather was Robert Frederick, some sort of royalty in Norway.*

- It was tradition in that family for each son to be named the reverse of their father. So you have Robert Frederick, then Frederick Robert, Robert Frederick, Frederick Robert, so on and so forth...passed all the way down to Rachel's grandfather, Robert Frederick, and then her Dad who's name is Brian....
- Completely breaking thousands of years of tradition!
- And that's what this feels like! John? Where does John come from?
  - God is always very intentional whenever He gives someone a name
  - **The Name John Means- "Jehovah is a gracious giver"**
  - So it's no coincidence that the Christmas story, begins with the birth story of the one who tell the whole world that God is a Gracious Giver!
- It only makes sense that the Season of Giving is based around the God that Graciously Gives!
- He graciously gave Zechariah and Elizabeth a baby boy in their old age
- But then He would Graciously Give His one and only Son to us, so that through Him, He would Graciously Give us Hope
  - He Graciously gives us Purpose
  - He Graciously gives us Understanding
  - He Graciously Gives us Peace
  - He Graciously Gives us Mercy
  - He Graciously Gives us an Opportunity to be a part of His Family
- ALL Because of the Baby that was Born in Bethlehem
  - Because He was Born, friendship with God is possible
  - Because He was Born, eternal life is attainable

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- Because He was Born, Joy is sustainable
- All due to the Good news that the Child in the Cradle became the King on the Cross
- Born to die, so that we could live.
- So that He could give us the greatest gift of all. The Gift of Salvation
- Which is really what this Hope is all about.
- We saw earlier the Hebrew definition of Hope,
  - But in the greek, we have the word **Hope (elpis): Joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation**
- **OUR HOPE IS IN HIS GRACIOUS GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE**
  - We are to live with a confident expectation that this world is not our home, that the brokenness of this life will not last forever, this season is just a vapor in the grand scheme of eternity, and we have forever to look forward to in Heaven where all things will be made whole, He will wipe every tear from every eye and sorrow and sin will exist no more
  - And yet, we will still have to wait on it
  - Because we are still here.
- John in his Gospel tells us that all who receive Him, all who believe in the Name of Jesus, are given the right to become Children of God
  - He doesn't say, all those who earned it, he doesn't say all those who were born in the right family, he doesn't say all those who do more good things than bad things
  - No, all those who Receive Him. Salvation is a free Gift from the God that Graciously Gives.
- After Zechariah was adamant in writing that his son's name would be John, verse 64 says, ***"And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up***

***in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.” -Luke 1:64-66 (ESV)***

- And Zechariah tells us exactly who this child would be. In verse 76 he speaks over his son, and says: ***“And you, child (John), will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” -Luke 1: 76-79 (ESV)***
- Even the birth of John wasn't about the birth of John. It was about preparing the way for the Sunrise that would visit us from on High.
- It was about prepare the world for the Hope that Jesus would bring!

- Even though Zechariah and Elizabeth's greatest desire for their family was fulfilled, there was an even greater Hope to be realized
- We all, at one point, were lost in darkness. And at some point, many of us finally realized the world had nothing to offer, God then allowed His Light to shine in our lives, to guide us and give us Hope and Peace.
- All because God sent that baby into the world so that the sin and selfishness that separated us from Him could be bridged by a cross. He paid the price for our mishaps and paved the way to our peace.
- And all it takes is believing and accepting the free gift of salvation and relationship that He offers.
- It has nothing to do with who we are or what we have done. It's all because of His Grace, and His Mercy.
- And you know the ministry that John the Baptist had, has been passed down to us



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- His job, was to tell people about the Hope of Jesus, so that when He arrived on the scene they could be more readily prepared to believe in Him and follow Him when they encountered Him
- That's what our ministry today is. We cannot convict anyone, we cannot change anyone, we cannot save anyone
  - And if we try to take that responsibility upon ourselves we will just make people resent us and give Christianity a bad name.
- Our job is to simply tell the Hope of Jesus Christ to all those around us.
  - So that when Jesus encounters them through His Holy Spirit, they will hopefully be more readily prepared to Believe in Him and Follow Him with us.
- And that's the opportunity we have to do this Christmas season. The season of Giving. To find every opportunity we can, to share about the God who Graciously Gives. Let's not keep that gift to ourselves.
- Let's let them know that HOPE IS HERE!