

The Cost of Unbelief

Luke 1:5-25; 57-65

ETS: Zechariah did not believe that God could do the seemingly impossible

ESS: We are often guilty of not believing that God can do the seemingly impossible

OSS: I want people to stop living in disbelief and believe that God is in control.

PQ: Are you paying the cost of unbelief?

UW: Costs

ME

FIND a piece of paper and get your pen or pencil handy.

- Pick a number between 1 and 10 and write it down.
- Multiply your number by 9.
- If you have a number with two digits, add the first and second digits together.
- Subtract 5.
- Pick the letter of the alphabet that corresponds to your number. (A is 1, B is 2, etc.)
- Think of a country in the world that begins with that letter.

- Take the next letter in the alphabet and think of an animal that begins with that letter.
- Of all the countries and animals in the world, do you think I can guess which ones you wrote down? Your answers are Denmark and elephant. Was I right? Pretty amazing, isn't it?

WE

New Series: Dr. Luke Investigates

- Carefully researched
- Eyewitness accounts
- Wrote account in “an orderly sequence”
 - So Dr. Luke’s “an orderly sequence” starts Pre-Jesus
 - Matthew starts with Mary, but Luke starts BEFORE Mary

WHY does Dr. Luke start BEFORE Mary?

WHY does Dr. Luke start with the birth of Mary’s nephew?

GOD

Luke 1:5-6 “In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah’s division named

Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

- **Person #1: King Herod the Great**
 - Reigned from 37 B.C to 4 A.D.
- **Person #2: Zechariah**
 - **priest of Abijah's division**
 - There were 24 divisions
 - Each division provided for the needs of the temple for a week, twice a year.
- **Person #3: Elizabeth**
 - Descendent of Aaron—the first high priest who served with Moses!

Luke 1:6 “Both were righteous in God’s sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord.”

- Both were **obedient** to God
- Both lived lives that that were “**Blameless**”

Luke 1:7 But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.”

There was *no scandal* regarding them—except one: They had **NO CHILDREN**

- **Procreation** was considered a **blessing**

- **Procreation** was **commanded** by God
- **Children** were seen as the greatest blessing: "**a heritage of the Lord**" (Ps. 127:3–5)

Barrenness was considered **curse** and a **punishment**.

- For example, **Abimelech** and his wives were punished, though only temporarily, with barrenness (Gen. 20:17–18),
 - **Michal**, Saul's daughter and David's wife (II Sam. 6:23).
- **Rachel**, Jacob's wife, stated that she **preferred death** to childlessness (Gen. 30:1)

Dr. Luke inserts a little medical information

- They "**could not conceive**"
 - Clearly, they had tried to have children
 - Being childless was **NOT** their choice or desire!
- Both were "**Well along in years**"
 - The **BIOLOGICAL** clock had stopped—there was **NO HOPE** for a child.

Obviously, this was **NOT** the **FIRST TIME** a couple had been in this situation!

- Abraham and Sarah had been in the exact same situation—clearly God could intervene and do the IMPOSSIBLE
 - BUT, there was NO REASON to expect God to intervene!

UP until this point, it had been 400 years since God last spoke to a prophet in Israel.

- In our context, it would be as if the LAST TIME God spoke was 1621!

WHY did not God not bless this devout couple?

- Maybe for the SAME REASONS God had not blessed other DEVOUT couples with children—Elizabeth and Zechariah were NOT the first on only couples to have been in this situation!

WHAT were the REASONS God had not blessed other “Righteous” couples with children?

- I don’t know, BUT in THIS CASE the reason will become clear!
 - God is about to display His glory by doing the IMPOSSIBLE!

Luke 1:8-9 “When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the

priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.”

- Do you think it was **coincidence** that Zechariah was “Chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense?” NO!
 - There were about **18,000 priests** who served so to be chosen to “**enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense**” was generally a *once-in-a-lifetime event!*

God is sovereign

- Definition: God is able to do whatever God wants to accomplish His plan!
- God was setting up the stage!
 - He chooses the couple
 - He keeps them from conceiving a child until they are PAST childbearing years.
 - He causes the lot to fall on Zechariah so he was will be ALONE in God’s sanctuary with God!

WHY is God creating an IMPOSSIBLE situation?

- To display His glory by making the impossible possible
- To test the faith of His followers

Zechariah has NO CLUE about what is happening— all he knows is that he is going to have the once-in-a-lifetime to be “Burn incense” in the Holy of Holy’s!

Luke 1:10-13 At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear.”

- This was NOT what Zechariah was expecting!
 - By the way, most of the time angels appear in the Bible, the people who see them are “terrified” – especially when they appear in their full **angelic form**.
- Notice the detail Dr. Luke provides: The angel appeared on the “right side of the altar”
 - Being on the “**right side**” was seen as position of blessing and favor
 - The fact that the angel was on the “**right side of the altar**” was a *subtle indication* that he was going to bring Zechariah GOOD NEWS—and he did.....

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.”

- They clearly had been praying for a child for years and now they have assurance that God has heard their prayer.
 - PROPHECY: Elizabeth will have a child, a son.
 - COMMAND: Zechariah is to name him John.

More PROPHECY: **Luke 1:14-18** “There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. 16 He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

- Their son is going to be what every believing parent wants: a child who loves God and lives for God!

Their future son....

- will be great in the sight of the Lord
- and will never drink wine or beer

- will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb
- will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God
- will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous
- [will] make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

This sounds IMPOSSIBLE!

- What their future child is prophesied to do, seems to be impossible!

WHEN YOU are faced with the impossible, WHAT is your response?

- If you **first response** to **turn to God** and **trust Him** or to **doubt God** can do something in the situation?
- Is your **first response** to **list** all the **REASONS** that God cannot make the seemingly impossible possible?

WHEN we are faced with the impossible, our faith is challenged!

- Zechariah loved and served God—he was a professional priest!
 - He spent his life **interceding** for people
 - He spent his life **teaching** about God
 - He spent his life **faithful** to God
 - BUT for the first time his faith was being challenged!

Zechariah was clearing being given a prophecy about the future, and he had to decide if he believed God could do the impossible!

Zechariah responds in a way you WOULDN'T EXPECT from a professional priest.

- REMEMBER, under the priestly robe was a sinful man who was being challenged to put his faith into action.
- *What Zechariah did is what we are all tempted to do when faced with the impossible—Tell God WHY He can't make the impossible possible!*

Luke 1:18 “How can I know this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.”

- Zechariah knew the story of Abraham and how God made the impossible possible—Zechariah

and Elizabeth's story was almost parallel to Abraham and Sarah!

- BUT, the heat of the moment, Zechariah forget what God had done in the past and was only thinking about the impossible situation he was facing.

Zechariah's **unbelief** is about to cost him **dearly**,

Luke 1:19-20 “The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. 20 Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

What does unbelief cost?

- What did Zechariah's unbelief cost?

**Unbelief costs the Experience of depending upon
God**

Zechariah asked: “**How can I know this?**”

- Zechariah wanted to “*know for Certain*” (v. 18)

This is a **supernatural event**

- You would think that Zechariah would have figured that since this was unusual event, that what was being predicted would also happen.

But no! He throws up **roadblocks** like “**How can I know this?**”

- Had Zechariah become **numb** to the **miraculous**?
- Had Zechariah lost the **wonder** of **God**?
 - It is hard to imagine that was the case since Zechariah is in the Holy of Holies:
1x/year—1x a lifetime
 - It is hard to imagine that was the case since an Angel had appeared to him!
 - “**Troubled**” (v. 12)
 - “**fear gripped him**” (v. 12)
- Had he forgotten God’s power?
 - It is hard to imagine that was the case because when a priest would go in to the Holy of Holy’s to burn incense, he **wore bells** and a **rope** in case he was **struck dead!**

REALITY: It is easy to get **numb** in church.

- You can spend your **whole life** in church **singing** about the **wonders** of God in songs like “**How Great Thou Art**” you can spend hours **listening**

to **sermons**, and **Sunday School lessons** that talk of the wonders of God.

- The **pastor and staff** can **teach** and **preach** the **ability** of God to surpass our **expectations** and *over time get numb to what we teach and preach.*

And then when God does burst onto the scene, when he satisfies a need in a miraculous way, we often throw up personal **roadblocks**.

- Notice Zechariah says **“How can I be sure of this?”**
 - How often has God presented you with a scenario and you feel He is leading you to move forward and we say **“How can I be certain?”**

We walk by Faith not sight!

- Everyone walks by faith in something!
- Christians walk by faith in the God of the universe
 - Faith that He exists
 - Faith that He is the creator of all
 - Faith that He cares about our needs

Notice the second part of Zechariah’s response **“I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”**

- It's like a **two-pronged excuse** that he gives as to why God cannot deliver what He just promised.
 - “Hey God I am too old and not only that but my wife is too old.”

When will we learn that **God is not bound** by the **things** that **bind** us!

- How often does God come to you and impresses upon you to do something for Him and you give all sorts of **excuses** as to why what he is asking can't happen?

How do I know that what I feel impressed to do is from God?

- TEST: Does it contradict God's Word?
- TEST: Does it help you grow in your faith and become more like Christ
- TEST: Will it ultimately help other believers
- TEST: Will it help build the kingdom of God?
- TEST: Will this stretch my faith?
- TEST: Will God receive the glory for this?

How often does he come to us as a church and we are not willing to follow?

- How often do we distrust God's ability?

- If God only asked us to do things that we could do in our own power, what would be the purpose of faith.
 - Faith does not come by sight.
 - God wants your faith—your faith that He can do more than you could ever ask or imagine.

Moved into our house yesterday....

- Felt God was leading us to stay at Warren
- Desire to ministry more to the community
- Desire to be a great part of the community
- Desire to reclaim the hours spent driving
- Desire to be on location more

Needed to sell Greenwood home:

- Real Estate market HOT!
 - May have 30 days after closing to find a house
 - Didn't want be pressured to find a home, close and move in within 30 days.
 - Didn't want to move to apartment
- Got a call to Sell for cash
 - Felt like we should call investigate
 - Set a price and they agreed to it!—we were shocked!
- Stipulation: with 3 month rent back

- Rent back fell through two weeks before closing
- Felt God was leading us to move, but now we were stuck
- Broker did not want to lose deal—we lived in a hot spot area of Greenwood
 - Agreed to pay to move things to storage, storage costs for 3 months and an apartment for three months
 - About a \$10,000 increase over initial sale price!

In meantime we got pre-approved for loan

We found a house in the neighbor we loved that was only about 6 minutes from church

- Offered 15k over asking price
 - Lost the house
 - I was defeated, but I prayed: “Lord, I assume you have something better for us.”

Roger told us about a house in his neighborhood—where we really liked--that he heard the owner wanted to sell but didn’t know the timeline.

Found a house in Castleton, but did not have a peace about it and did not place an offer.

Felt God was telling me to talk to Roger

- Roger called me on Sunday and said “Someone is there if you want to talk to them.”
 - We were still at the church so we decided to pop in
 - Owner was reluctant at first because of the condition of the house, but she allowed to go through it.

That night her realtor called and said that another party was interested, but we could make an offer.

- We made an offer and they accepted it.

I called loan officer but he was out-of-town and his assistant did not return my calls

- Five days passed and I was getting nervous
 - The day before the home inspection the loan officer calls back
 - He tells me that we can’t get the loan—even though we had been preapproved
 - The only debt we had was our current house and we had co-signed on our son’s student loan—which he had been paying

We went to the inspection feeling dejected—neither of us wanted to be there.

- My realtor—who is awesome—came over and I told him the situation
 - He said, “let me work on it.”

That afternoon I called the loan officer back to review numbers, we discovered that the error was on his end and he told me “We can move forward with the loan.”

A week passes

- Inspection report shows a problem with the house
 - We ask own to renegotiate and they did!

We were set to close on Greenwood home on Nov. 2 and the new home on Nov. 4th

- Loan officer calls and says they want to push closing back to Nov. 10th
 - I did not want to go back to the seller again with another negotiation

I ran across a days old email of a local loan company my realtor had sent me when we initially were told we could not get the loan.

- I called and told them the situation—Remember, it usually takes 20-30 days to close a loan—we had about 15 days at this point.
 - They said, “Let’s see what we can do.”—that was on Thursday
 - By Monday they had the loan application processed and sent to the underwriter!
 - By Friday the underwriter gave us the magic words: “Cleared to Close”
 - We closed on Nov. 4th!

All along the way, I felt a peace about the house

- There were times when I felt the Lord said, “You are going to have this house”—even though it seemed to be an impossible situation
 - Every time there was a roadblock the Lord opened a door and provided a way.

Has it been easy? NO.

Were there moments of struggle? Yes

There is a JOY that can only be experienced when you **depend upon** and **Trust God!**

- I will always view that home as an example of God taking the seemingly impossible and making it possible.

What does unbelief cost?

- What did Zechariah's unbelief cost?

Unbelief costs expectation of answered prayer

“Your prayer has been heard” (v. 13)

Zechariah and Elizabeth had apparently been praying for a **child** for **years**, but never had any children.

- He may have kept praying for a child, but somewhere along the way, *Zechariah stopped believing that having a child was possible.*
 - Maybe the prays for a child had become more **rote** than **requests rooted** in the belief that God can do the **impossible!**

WHAT kind of prayers should we pray? “**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven**”

God's Will may not be to give you what you want because that is **not best** for you at that time.

- God had **not given** Zechariah and Elizabeth a **child** on **their timetable** because *He had something else planned—something better.*
 - **Better:** They would get a son **filled with the Holy Spirit from birth** (v. 15)
 - **Better:** They would get a son who would **turn many back to the way of the Lord** (v. 16)
 - **Better:** They would get a son who would be the **forerunner** of the Lord! (v. 17)

Don't put God on your **timetable!**

- When you do, you will end up paying the cost of unbelief

Don't **predetermine** how you want God to respond!

- *When you do, you will end up paying the cost of unbelief*
 - **Zechariah** did not **determine** that God would respond this way
 - **Zechariah expected** God to respond in the **normal manner**—one day Elizabeth would excitedly announce she was **pregnant.**
 - **Zechariah was not expecting** an **angel** to appear!

Don't **predetermine** what God has to do!

- Remember you are not God!

The **purpose of prayer** is NOT to give God information!

- The purpose of prayer is to **align your heart** with God's!
 - **Pour** out your **heart** to God
 - **Tell** Him the **desires** of your heart!
 - But in the end, **submit to whatever answer**, in whatever way He chooses to respond!

Unbelief costs Joy

Zechariah's unbelief stifled his joy!

- **Luke 1:20-23** “Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.” 21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. 22 When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. 23 When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home.

Football fans can you imagine if your team **just won** and you went “**mute**” wouldn’t you be frustrated?

- Do a mime of hand signals

For **9 months Zechariah couldn’t speak a word** (*I am sure that at time Elizabeth enjoyed the silence!*)

Don’t you think that Gabriel overreacted a little here?

The name “Gabriel” means “man of God”

- Gabriel is **insulted** at the **response**.

What does Gabriel care about Zechariah’s response?

- Well, notice what he says “**I stand in the presence of God.**”
 - **Gabriel** is in **God’s presence** He **SEES God at work**, He has **WATCHED** God perform countless **miracles**, intervene in miraculous ways.
 - He knows that there in **nothing impossible** for God and yet here this “**priest**” this “*Man of God*” **challenging** God’s **ability!**

Zechariah not only lost out on the joy of God’s answer to his prayer for 9 months, but he lost out on the moment of his son’s birth.

- Notice in **v. 57-58**: Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. 58 Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her.
- Zechariah no doubt was **rejoicing** too—he was just **muted**!
 - He was **missing** the **full impact** of the joy!

God may work despite your unbelief, but because you were not willing to trust Him, your joy will likely be dulled.

- When you stopped praying for someone and then they receive Christ, you will rejoice but how much better would that joy have been had you continued to prayer for them.
- You didn't pray for God's help and unexpectedly God sent you help. You know it was from Him, but because you didn't believe your request mattered to God or answering it just seemed impossible, you missed some of the joy due to your unbelief.

For **8 days after** his son's birth Zechariah still could not speak!

- **Luke 1:59-64** “When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. 60 But his mother responded, “No. He will be called John.”61 Then they said to her, “None of your relatives has that name.” 62 So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. 63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they were all amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.
 - For the next several verses Zechariah praises God with an incredible song.

WE

Zechariah did not believe that God could do the seemingly impossible: His unbelief costs him!

- It can be easy to not believe God can do the impossible!
 - We can talk about God doing the impossible, but when it comes down to it, do we really believe?
 - Are we willing to trust Him despite the circumstances?
 - Are we willing to step out in faith when we feel He is calling us to do so?

Challenge: Trust God to do the impossible!

John, Zechariah's son, was the **forerunner** of Jesus Christ.

- Jesus Christ was the long-awaited answer to the prayer for a Messiah.

The sad thing is that **30 years later** when **Jesus** began his **ministry**, it was constantly met with **unbelief!**

- **Religious people refused** to believe that He was the Messiah despite the evidence otherwise
- **People refused** to believe that **God had answer their prayers** and fulfilled His promise.
- Those who refused to believe missed out on the joy of salvation.

It is no different today.

Challenge: Trust God to do the impossible!

- God is sovereign—He can do whatever He wants to accomplish His purpose.
 - Trust Him to do what is best.

PQ: Do you live in unbelief or Trust?