

Luke 1

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on Luke 1 explores the humanity of Christ and the divine preparations for His coming through the lives of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary.

Scripture: Luke 1:1-59, Luke 1:69-80

Topics: "The Humanity of Christ", "God's Promises and Fulfillment"

Description

John Nelson Darby presents the Gospel of Luke as a portrayal of Jesus in His humanity, emphasizing His role as the Son of Man and the grace of God amidst human struggles. He highlights the significance of Luke's account, which focuses on Christ Himself rather than His official roles or divine nature, and illustrates the unfolding of God's plan through the lives of ordinary people like Zacharias and Mary. The sermon underscores the importance of faith, humility, and the fulfillment of God's promises, as seen in the miraculous births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Darby also draws attention to the joy and praise that arise from recognizing God's grace and intervention in the lives of His people.

Transcript

The Saviour is presented to us in Luke in His character as Son of man, displaying the power of Jehovah in grace in the midst of men. At first, doubtless, we find Him in relationship with Israel, to whom He had been promised; but afterwards moral principles are brought out, which apply to man, as such, wherever he might be. And indeed what characterises Luke's account of our Lord, and gives special interest to his Gospel, is that it presents to us Christ Himself, and not His official glory as in Matthew, nor His mission or service as in Mark, nor the peculiar revelation of His divine nature as in John. It is Himself, such as He was, a man upon the earth, moving among men day by day.

Verses 1-4. Many had undertaken to give an account of what was historically received amongst Christians, as it had been related to them by the eye-witnesses. However well intended this might be, yet it was a work undertaken and executed by men. Luke had an exact and intimate knowledge of all from the beginning, and he found it good to write in order to Theophilus, that he might know the certainty of the things he had been instructed in. It is thus that God has provided for the whole church by the teaching contained in the living picture of Jesus that we owe to this man of God. For Luke, although he might be personally moved by Christian motives, was of course none the less inspired by the Holy Ghost to write.

Verses 5-17. The history brings us into the midst of Jewish institutions, feelings, and expectations. First, we have a priest of Abia (one of the twenty-four classes: 1 Chr. 24), with his wife who was of the

daughters of Aaron. "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." All with them was in accordance with God's law Jewishly; but they did not enjoy the blessing so earnestly desired by every Jew; they were childless. Yet it was according to the ways of God to accomplish His work of blessing while manifesting the weakness of the instrument which He was using. But now this long-prayed-for blessing was to be withheld no longer; and when Zacharias draws near to offer the incense, the angel of Jehovah appears to him. At the sight of so glorious a being Zacharias is troubled; but the angel says to him, "Fear not, thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John," that is, "the favour of Jehovah." And not only should the hearts of many rejoice in him, but he should be great in the sight of the Lord and be filled with the Holy Ghost. "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." The "spirit of Elias" was a firm and ardent zeal for the glory of Jehovah and for the re-establishment, through repentance, of Israel's relations with Him. The heart of John clung to this link of the people with God, and it is in the moral force of his call to repentance that John is here compared to Elias.

38 Verses 18-23. But Zacharias's faith, as is alas! so often the case, was not equal to the greatness of his request. He knows not how to walk in the steps of Abraham, and he asks again how such a thing can be. God's goodness turns the unbelief of His servant into a chastening that was profitable for him, and that served, at the same time, as a proof to the people that he had been visited from on high. Zacharias remains dumb until the word of Jehovah is accomplished.

Verses 24, 25. Elizabeth, with feelings so suitable to a holy woman, remembering what had been a shame to her in Israel (the traces of which were only made the more marked by the supernatural blessing now granted to her), hides herself, whilst at the same time she owns the Lord's goodness to her. But what may conceal us from the eyes of men has great value before God.

Verses 26-38. And now the scene changes, in order to introduce the Lord Himself into this marvellous scene that is unfolding itself before our eyes. In Nazareth, that despised place, there was found a young virgin, unknown by the world, whose name was Mary. She was espoused to Joseph, who was of the house of David; but so out of order was everything in Israel, that this descendant of the king was a carpenter. But what is this to God? Mary was a chosen vessel; she had found favour in the eyes of God.

We must remark that the subject here is the birth of the child Jesus as born of Mary. It is not so much His divine nature as the Word which was God and which was made flesh (though, of course, it is the same precious Saviour presented here as in John's Gospel); but it is Jesus as really and truly man - born of a virgin. His name was to be Jesus, that is, Jehovah the Saviour. "He shall be called the Son of the highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" - still looking at Him as man born into the world. But He was God as well as man. Holy by His birth, conceived by the power of God, this blessed One, who even as born of Mary is spoken of as "that holy thing," was to be called "the Son of God."

39 The angel then tells Mary of the blessing God had bestowed upon Elizabeth. The wonderful intervention of God had rendered Mary humble instead of lifting her up: she had seen God and not herself in what had happened. Self was hidden from her because God had been brought so near, and she bows to His holy will. "Be it unto me according to thy word."

Verses 39-45. Afterwards we find that Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, for her heart loves to see and acknowledge the goodness of the Lord. Elizabeth, speaking by the Spirit, acknowledges Mary as the

mother of her Lord, and announces the accomplishment of God's promise. "Blessed is she that believed," etc.

Verse 46. The heart of Mary is filled with joy, and she breaks forth into a song of praise. She acknowledges God her Saviour in the grace that has filled her with such joy, whilst, at the same time, she owns her utter littleness. For whatever might be the holiness of the instrument that God might employ, and that was found really in Mary, yet she was only great so long as she hid herself; for then God was everything. By making something of herself she would have lost her place; but this she did not. God kept her in order that His grace might be fully manifested.

The character of the thoughts that fill the heart of Mary is Jewish. It reminds us of Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2, which speaks prophetically of this same blessed intervention of God. But Mary goes back to the promises made to the fathers, and takes in the whole of Israel.

Verse 56. After remaining three months with Elizabeth, she returns to her house humbly to follow her own path, in order that God's ways may be accomplished. Nothing is more beautiful in its way than this account of the conversations of these holy women, unknown to the world, but who were the instruments of God's grace to accomplish His glorious designs. They moved in a scene where nothing entered but piety and grace. But God was there Himself, no better known to the world than were these poor women, but preparing and accomplishing what the angels would desire to look into.

40 Verses 57-59. But what is only known in secret by faith is at last to be accomplished before all men. The son of Zacharias and Elizabeth is born, and Zacharias, no longer dumb, pronounces the blessed prophecy we have in verses 69-80. The visitation of Israel by Jehovah, which he speaks of, embraces all the happiness of the millennium, connected with the presence of Jesus upon the earth. All the promises are Yea and Amen in Him. All the prophecies encircle Him with the glory which will be then realised. We know that, since He has been rejected and while He is now absent, the accomplishment of these things is necessarily put off till His return.

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