

Luke Chapter 1 v 26 - 45

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] A warm welcome to all of you, particularly folk visiting, some folk from Stafford visiting, and well, some family and friends of a certain young lady whose birthday is this week, somebody's birthday this week, or a couple of ladies' birthdays this week, some young ladies.

Let's make mention of that in a moment or two. But lovely to see you as well, family, and great that we can be here together. Today is first Sunday of December. Unbelievable, isn't it?

And of course, as our minds are set thinking upon the coming of our Lord Jesus, then several verses in the Bible come to mind in Isaiah in chapter 9.

A son is born, a child is given. Who is this child? We know who he is. He is the Son of God.

But what's he come to do? The government is on his shoulders. The power, the authority, the rule belongs to him. He is coming as king, coming to govern, coming to rule in the hearts and lives of God's people.

[1 : 21] So our first hymn is in our hymn books, number 304. At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him king of glory. Now the king is coming, and we can rejoice in that. Jesus, our king. 304.

Let's come to the Lord in prayer together. Let us pray.

What an amazing title that belongs to your son, the Lord Jesus, king of glory. What an amazing promise that you gave to your people those hundreds of years before his birth through Isaiah the prophet.

To us a son is given, a child is born. What can one boy do? What can one child do in this world? But this child who was to be born, this son who was given, was and is none other than the very Son of God himself. The eternal, everlasting Son.

[2 : 39] The one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The one who was there when creation was spoken into life before the world was made. The one who has always been and always shall be.

And yet the one who came as a child, came in weakness, in smallness, in, one sense, helplessness.

The almighty, the all-powerful, the great God becomes weak and dependent upon his mother. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that though we don't fully understand the wonder and the marvel which to us is Christmas.

The giving of yourself, the Son of God, to come into this world for us. We know the consequences. We know the results. We know what you did in your coming.

You came, yes, to be the one who would be king. Not just the king, but the saviour king. The king who would come to deliver his people from their enemies.

[3 : 40] The king who would come to bring God's law and righteousness and goodness into our lives. To dispel our sin. And set us free from its entrapment and chains.

To bring us into the freedom of the joy of the children of God. You, the Son of God, came that we might become children of God. Oh, Lord, we rejoice and delight as we begin this Advent season.

As we begin this run-up to Christmas. As we begin, Lord, to think again and again of what it meant to you. To give up heaven and all its glory and comforts and delights and joys.

To give up that place of perfect goodness. To come into our broken and sinful and selfish and corrupt world. To come down to our level.

Lord, to reach out your hand to us. To roll up your sleeve and get dirty with us. Not that you ever sinned, but Lord, that you endured the pain that we endure.

[4 : 42] You felt the sorrow, the grief, the heartache, the loss. You felt the pain. A pain, Lord, probably that none of us shall ever feel. And you were crucified on our behalf.

Not just in the body, but in your very heart of hearts. You tasted of the punishment for sin. You felt and endured hell in our place. That we might be saved from and delivered from.

And never have to feel hell ourselves. Oh, Lord, we thank you again. That as we come this morning to sing your praises. Oh, Lord, our God.

And the praises of your Son. And the praises of your Holy Spirit. We can do so because Jesus has made us your children. We pray, oh Lord, that as we come, we may come with that sense of rejoicing, thankfulness, and delight in you, our Heavenly Father.

And that, Lord, we might come with that desire to hear you speak to us. For your words are always words of grace, of loving kindness, of faithfulness.

[5 : 45] Oh, Lord, meet with us then. Bless us then. Make yourself known to us. If we've never even known you or met you. Lord, if you seem strange to us, then make yourself familiar to us.

That, Lord, we may enter into the joy of sins forgiven and life everlasting of the family of God. We ask these things, Father, in and through the name of Jesus, your Son.

Amen. Let's turn together now in our Bibles to Luke and chapter 1. Luke and chapter 1.

And beginning at verse 26. Luke chapter 1, beginning at verse 26. If you've got one of the red church Bibles, then that's page 1025.

Page 1025. Luke chapter 1. So we began looking at the Gospel of Luke.

[6 : 45] And this is our third week in the Gospel of Luke. We looked last week particularly at the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. And now moving into verse 26.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favoured. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son. You are to call him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end.

[7 : 51] How will this be? Mary asked the angel, Since I am a virgin. The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come on you. The power of the Most High will overshadow you.

So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. And she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zachariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

[8 : 57] As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her.

So if you... Oh yeah. That's the choir practice, can I just show you ready for that?

Now, let's turn back then to Luke in chapter 1. It's a passage that we read, the announcement of Gabriel to Mary, that she would have this child to be born.

As I said before, we're working our way through Luke, the whole gospel, and we started just a few weeks ago, and it seemed appropriate that as we led up to Christmas, that we were in these passages, again, reminding us of all that is taking place.

In one sense, when we looked at the announcement of the birth to Elizabeth and Zachariah, it was the beginning. Luke had said, I'm going back to the beginning.

[10 : 01] I'm going to start and tell you everything from the beginning. And in one sense, a bit like a rocket which is launched into space. This is stage one of the rocket, as it's propelled up through the atmosphere towards the edge of space.

But as we get to chapter 1, verse 26, we're stage 2. And we're leaving earth in one sense. We're leaving earth, and we're entering into something which is quite marvellous, heavenly, spectacular, glorious.

Because Zachariah and Elizabeth was a miracle, there's no doubt about it, but here were a man and a woman, yes, aged. Elizabeth, infertile, but child is conceived.

It's not unknown for that to happen. Women maybe going through the change, and suddenly finding for the first time they're pregnant. These things can happen, though we know that this was a work of God, because they were much older than that.

But when we get to the announcement to Mary, that she, a virgin and unmarried young woman, a woman that has had no sexual relations with a man, is going to be pregnant, apart from the natural course of things, then we are going way beyond the earthly way of thinking of things.

[11:26] We are going right up into the stratosphere. And what have we been noticing? We've been noticing particularly that what is happening in this progression, in this wonderful moving forward, is that God is fulfilling His purposes and His plans for His people.

He is bringing about all that He promised in the Old Testament. And we saw as well, particularly last week, that the way that God works, and is working in the life of Zachariah and Elizabeth, and then on into the life of Mary and others as well, is in keeping with how He has worked before.

And so when we think about Zachariah and Elizabeth, there's echoes in our minds of another elderly couple who could not conceive and gave birth when they were very old, Abraham and Sarah.

And when we hear about an announcement of an angel telling an infertile couple that they were going to have a child, then again our minds are drawn to Judges and Samson and Manoah and his wife.

There's echoes, there's this flow through the Bible, this unity in the Scripture, that God works as He has worked before. And that's very important, and we picked up on it a little bit, but I want to just take that a little further for a moment before we get back to this passage.

[12:42] The God that we worship is a God who follows His own style. I've heard it that way. He's a God who follows a pattern of His own character, which is uniquely His own.

And when we come to the Bible and read through it, then we can see that. We need to look for that. We need to see, oh yes, we can see this is God at work, just as He's done before. He is following on.

He is carrying on in the way He fulfills His purposes and plans. God is not a sort of a God who changes course, who does things in one sense out of character.

He is keeping with His character. And I think that's very important as well for us as Christians because there are times, you know, when as Christians we can be concerned about what we hear from other Christians or people who are talking about their experiences as Christians, talking about things that are happening or teaching things about God.

And there's something within us that at times can make us concerned or even confused.

Extraordinary things are said that God has done or experiences that people have had and believe that they are the work of God's Holy Spirit.

[13:57] And of course we don't want to be judgmental. We don't want to be necessarily critical or unbelieving. We feel, well, though there's an unease, we feel perhaps we just have to accept that what they say is true and what they say has been a work of God.

But the Bible tells us very clearly, and Paul does himself in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, that we are to test all things. So he begins by saying, do not quench the Spirit, that's the Holy Spirit, do not, as it were, pour water upon His work, if I put it that way.

Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all. Hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil. So how can we test our own experiences, perhaps those things that we hear about in the Christian media or hear people declaring or speaking about?

How can we test these things as we are called to do so when we are told that they are the work of the Spirit? Well, one important test is to ask simply this, does this experience follow God's pattern of working as we see it in the Bible?

Is it in keeping with what God has done before and how God has worked before? Or is it something extraordinary? Now that's not an infallible test because we know that our God is a God who is not limited in any way.

[15:17] He can do whatever He pleases in whatever way He pleases. However, there's a consistency in the very dealings of God, the work of God, a consistency in His character.

He never acts contrary to who He is. He never will. He never can. He cannot go against who He is. He is holy. He is just. He is pure.

He is good. He is faithful. He is loving. And all these things that are Him. And so in one sense, we can say, well, when something happens in the life of a person who claims it is a work of God, we need to ask, is it producing holiness?

Because that's what God does. Because that's who He is. Is it producing love? Because that's what God is. That's what God does. We have this, in one sense, test.

Does this experience, does this teaching reveal God for who He is? Now, of course, there's a temptation, isn't there, amongst all of us. We like the exciting. We like the novel.

[16:19] That's the world in which we live. They want something novel. They want something new, something different, something that they've never seen or heard before. And if we're not careful as Christians, we can think that's how God works as well, but He doesn't.

He works in extraordinary ways, in wonderful ways, in marvelous ways, in ways which baffle and blow our minds, but they are always in keeping with who He is, in keeping in His character.

And of course, above all else, any teaching or any experience that is the work of God cannot be contrary to God's revelation in His Word of Himself.

It cannot undermine His Word as revealed in the Bible. We cannot say that God has said this or done this when the Bible refutes that completely. So to take a very extreme example, extreme example, if a person tells you that God the Holy Spirit has given them a heart of hatred towards their enemy, then of course, you know that cannot be the work of God because Jesus Himself has told us in His Word to love your enemy in Matthew chapter 5.

That's an extreme example, but it's important for us. I just want us again just to take hold of that because I think it's helpful for us practically as we live in a world of all sorts of voices coming our way, all sorts of voices speaking in the name of God and telling us what God says or what we should think.

[17:53] We're always being brought back to the way God has worked and the way that God is and the way that God has revealed Himself in His Word. So God is doing that.

God is working again in the ways that He's worked before but in wonderful, extraordinary, marvellous ways when He speaks to Mary and tells her that she is going to have a son.

So let's get back to that again for a moment because there's a very key verse there, isn't there, in verse 37. It's interesting that the NIV, the New International Version, 2011, has this translation, for no word from God will ever fail.

Other translations have been, for nothing is impossible with God. But I'm going to pick up and run with this translation here. It's bright and proper in one sense.

They're both saying the same thing. God can do whatever He likes and wants. This phrase, for no word from God will ever fail, is actually fulfilled in a couple of ways.

[19:00] It's fulfilled in the sense that it explains what God is doing in Mary's life, fulfilling His word, His promise, as we shall see in a moment.

But it's also the grounds for Mary's faith that what God has said He will do for her, He will do in the future. The word that God brings through Gabriel to Mary is so that the promises He's made in the past might be fulfilled.

We saw that before, earlier. There's that particular sense, isn't there, later in the chapter, verse 55, to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as He promised our ancestors.

And again, over in verse 70, as He said through His holy prophets long ago, God is keeping His word, fulfilling His word. And in particular, I would say, dear friends, that what we have here in the words of Gabriel, the messenger of God, is fulfillment, or God telling Mary He is fulfilling His promise in Isaiah chapter 9.

We saw that at the very start of our service, didn't we? If you've got a Bible and you can, just turn back there for a moment. Isaiah chapter 9, that verse which is repeatedly read as we draw near to Christmas, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulder, and He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Verse 7, of the greatness of His government and peace, there will be no end.

[20:37] Now this verse is fulfilled in the words of Gabriel. Just, if you can, look and compare the words of Gabriel as he speaks in verse 32.

He, that's the one who is born, will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, for to us a son is given. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David.
Now that's key, particularly because we're told in verse 7 of Isaiah 9, He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, and, Gabriel says, the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father. He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end. Of the greatness of His government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and beholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.
Do you see what's happening here? As Gabriel is standing before Mary, he's speaking out the very fulfillment of the promises of God to Isaiah and the people through him 600 years before.
[21 : 47] But actually, the promise goes even further back than that. Because it goes back to David himself.

Psalms 132 speaks about the promise that God gave to King David. The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath he will not revoke. One of your descendants I will place on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then your sons, sorry, their sons shall sit on your throne forever and ever. A promise, a covenant promise God made to David the king that they would be upon his throne one of his descendants for all generations.
And it's obvious that Luke understands that because in his introduction to Gabriel's visit, he makes this, we might say, offhand comment, doesn't he, in verse 27.
A virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, oh, by the way, a descendant of David. And he will sit on David's throne. We're seeing again that God is at work in keeping his promise.
[23 : 02] We're to understand that what is happening in the birth of this son is the fulfillment of God's promises of long ago and that this one who is coming is a descendant of King David.

But hold on, that promise that was given and then repeated in Psalm 88 speaks about there being a king on the throne of David's descent for all generations.
But for several hundred years there hadn't been. For several hundred years there had not been a descendant of King David. The last king in David's line was King Zedekiah.
Zedekiah was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, the emperor, the king of Babylon who invaded the country, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and took Zedekiah and the people away into exile in 586 BC.

When the people returned 70 years later according to God's promise because he'd said to them even as they went, don't worry, 70 years, I'll bring you back. God did that but there was no king.
[24 : 14] No king appointed over them but various rulers and emperors and authorities of differing kingdoms. The King Herod that we read about at the very start of Luke, verse 5, in that time of King Herod of Judea, he wasn't a direct descendant of David at all.

He was simply a king put in position there by the Roman authorities who occupied the land. No king for 600 years who was a descendant of David set upon the throne so God must have forgotten his promise.

Or had he? Didn't there times when we ourselves feel as if God has forgotten his promises to us? Lord, where are you? You said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

Lord, where are you? I feel forsaken and I feel as if you're far, far away. Times when the bills come through the door and we look at the bank account balance and it doesn't seem to tally up and God, you said, my God shall supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus but here's the bills and here's my income and I haven't got enough to pay the bills.

Have you forgotten your promise? Times in our hearts and lives where we feel ourselves under deep conviction of sin and we feel bad and we feel as if ourselves to be condemned and you've said, Lord Jesus, in your word that there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus but why is it I feel condemned?

[25 : 51] Why is it I feel my sin and the guilt of it upon me? Where's your promise, Lord? Where's your faithfulness, Lord? Let me assure you, let me say to you again and again, dear friends, from the very evidence of God's word, even from the evidence of God's word here in the announcement of this promise of God to Mary, God has not forgotten his promises to you and God has not let his promises fall to the ground for you.

Let's just take this promise for a moment. Remember that promise that we read about? It says, if your sons keep my covenant, the statutes I teach them, then your sons will sit on your throne forever and ever.

There is a condition to that promise. And for several generations after David, Solomon, there were those kings of Judah who kept God's covenant.

There were those kings who it was spoken about that each walked in the ways of his father David had followed. And there was a few who sort of weren't very good.

Solomon at the end mucked it up. But on the whole, for a few generations, the kings were following after the way of David. But then, as you go further down the line, you can read this in 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Kings and Chronicles.

[27 : 16] You find something different is happening. Every now and then you'll get, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord but not as his father David had done. They started to wander away.

They stopped keeping the covenant. They stopped trusting the Lord. Until at last, as we get near the end of the line towards Zedekiah and the others, we find things like this being said of the kings. Unlike his father David, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Or he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. It usually meant that they exchanged their worship of the true and living God to the worship of idols, the worship of false gods in the surrounding nations.

And yet, amazingly, when you read through those stories, when you read through the accounts of those kings, from David to Zedekiah, the Lord repeatedly speaks to those who had broken his covenant and those who had not kept his laws, we read, Nevertheless, because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David.

God continued to be faithful to his promise when they were not faithful to the promise. Yet, even when there was no king on David's throne, God was planning to bring this promise to its perfect fulfillment in the coming of the last and great king, Jesus.

[28 : 38] God hadn't forgotten. God hadn't changed his plan. God hadn't gone back on his word. He never will. He never can. It had always been his plan that he would place his only son, the true son of God, upon the throne to rule as king over his people.

The psalmist says in Psalm 2 of God, I have installed my king upon my holy mountain. I will proclaim the Lord's decree.

He said to me, you are my son. That's always been the plan. And so when we come to Luke in chapter 1 and we read this promise to Mary from Gabriel the angel that you will conceive and give birth to a son and he will be great and be called the son of the most high, the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever.

His kingdom will never end. We are reading the bringing about, the formation, the bringing to life of all God's promises. And that has a very profound effect.

moment. Because I want to say something now which I think for many of us will be something of a shock. Something of a surprise.

[30 : 02] Because what we notice in the announcement, remember this is Luke, from the beginning, from the start, there's a progression happening. Here's the first mention of the coming of the Messiah, the Savior, and what is he coming to be?

He's not coming firstly to be our Savior but coming to be our King. Do you see that? There's no mention of Jesus being the Savior of sinners here in this announcement.

There's no mention of him coming to rescue God's people. He's coming to rule God's people, to have authority over God's people, to be King of God's people. Now of course it's right for us to speak of Jesus as the Savior of the world but that's not Luke's emphasis here.

Later on when Gabriel comes again with the host of angels and speaks to the shepherds on the night of Christ's birth, he says, there's great news to the town of David a Savior has been born but that's later on.

And sometimes, dear friends, we can miss this and we can be so emphasizing the salvation of God that we forget the rightful place of God as King.

[31 : 14] begins with him as Lord, begins with him as having authority, begins with him as ruler. The Christian life has to begin in that way and it's a priority not that I've brought about but that God has placed here in his word.

Not by chance. God's will for all people of the world is that they should submit to Jesus Christ as their personal King, the rightful ruler of their lives, the one who's full authority over what they do. It's the very reason and purpose Jesus was born into this world to be God's King for God's people. We read one of the most joyful, blessed passages of Scripture in Philippians chapter 2 which speaks about the coming of the Savior, coming of Christ, born, laying aside his majesty and his

glory, taking on our humanity and that of a servant and going to death.

What's the purpose for his death? We read that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. So the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever.

Who are Jacob's descendants? Just the Jews? No, of course not. They are those who have the same faith as Jacob, the same faith as Abraham. They are the people of God. And if we want to be part of the family of God, if we want to know the grace of God, if we want to enjoy the favour of God, it has to begin with us bowing the knee before the king that God has placed upon his throne.

[33 : 02] Elizabeth knew that, Mary knew that. Do you think it's quite astonishing what Elizabeth says there in verse 43? Mary comes to her house, Elizabeth greets her, the Holy Spirit fills her, John the Baptist in the womb.

He's not just an embryo, he's not some unfeeling creature, he is a living person who is able to be filled with the Spirit and born children are children.

And she says in a loud voice, verse 42, Blessed are you among the women and blessed is the charge you'll bear. But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord, who is that?

The mother of my Lord, the mother of my master, the mother of my king, the mother of the one to whom I will submit and bow down and acknowledge that I am his servant should come to me.

And Mary herself again has that attitude, doesn't she, which is such an example to us. I am the Lord's servant. May your word be fulfilled to me.

[34 : 14] The beginning of the Christian life begins by acknowledging that Jesus is my king. Not just the king of the universe, not just the king of the world, but the king of my heart, the king of my life.

That's where we have to start. That's where we have to begin. Acknowledging his authority. Do you want to enjoy the forgiveness of your sins?

Then you've got to bring them to Christ, your king, so that he can pardon them. He alone has the authority and the power to pardon sin. Do you want to have eternal life in heaven?

Then you must take your request to the king of heaven, who alone can grant you entrance into his home? Do you want to enjoy this life that God has given you to the full?

Then you have to set your heart upon the king's commands to keep them and to do them. What about you?

[35 : 19] And what about me? Is Christ the king of your life? Or is there a power struggle that's going on in your life?

I'm happy to have Jesus come. I'm happy that he comes to give me God's love. I'm happy that he comes to give me God's peace. I'm happy that he comes to be that child in the manger, even the one who suffered for me on the cross.

I'm happy to look forward to heaven and eternal life, but in this life now, there's a power struggle going on over who is on the throne of my life.

Perhaps some of us as Christians have this idea of a power-sharing coalition. Yes, Jesus, you can be king over these bits, but I've got power over these bits. He's king or he's not king.

He's lord or he's not lord. He has authority or he doesn't have authority. You can't share the two.

There's no space, if I can put it this way. Your heart isn't big enough for the two of you, you and Christ.

[36 : 32] Or are your words, is your attitude as you start each day, as you face each decision, as you look at each circumstance, is your attitude reflected in the very words of Mary, I am the Lord's servant.

let your word be fulfilled in my life. Let your will be done. Let your kingdom come. Jesus has come to be king, but with him comes all the blessings, the joy, the delight of salvation too.

Well, let's pray together briefly and then we'll sing our final hymn. We thank you, our Lord, our God, that you planned and purposed to send your son, the Lord Jesus, into this world.

Lord, we thank you that all through history you were building up to that great event, that most historic, earth-changing, life-transforming event.

we thank you that Jesus, though he came as a babe, born in a stable, laid in a manger in weakness and helplessness, was and always will be the very king of heaven, the Lord of glory, the one upon whose shoulders is government and power and rule.

