

Luke 1:18-25

The Danger of Unbelief

January 28, 2024

1. Intro

- a. John Piper, retired pastor and seminary president, preached these words back in 1988...
 - i. “All sins come from unbelief in the promises of God. All the sinful states of our hearts are owing to unbelief in God’s super-abounding willingness and ability to work for us in every situation of life so that everything turns out for our good. Anxiety, misplaced shame, indifference, regret, covetousness, envy, lust, bitterness, impatience, despondency, pride — these are all sprouts from the root of unbelief in the promises of God.”
 1. ALL sin is rooted in our unbelief
 - a. That’s a pretty sweeping statement, isn’t it?
 - i. ALL sin is rooted in unbelief?
 1. Our prideful response when someone belittles us, or doesn’t give us the respect we think we deserve?
 2. Our covetousness toward someone who has that “better life” that we long to have?
 3. Our lustful thoughts when we’re alone and in a moment of weakness?
 4. Our anger at God for not coming through for us as we had hoped?
 - b. Can we really say that ALL of these sins, and every other sin, are rooted in UNBELIEF regarding the promises of God?
 - i. This is the question we’ll seek to answer this morning, as we look again at Zechariah’s encounter with the angel, Gabriel, in Luke ch. 1
 - b. Last week, we looked at Luke 1:8-17, as Gabriel announced to Zechariah the incredible promise that he and Elizabeth would have a child in their old age
 - i. Not only would they have a child in their old age, but this child would be great before the Lord, filled with the Holy Spirit, even in his mother’s womb
 1. As he grew into a man, and began his ministry as the last of the line of Old Testament prophets, their son, John the Baptist, would turn the hearts of the people back to their God
 - a. He would help heal the divide that existed within so many families
 - b. He would point the people back to the wisdom of God
 - c. He would make ready a people prepared for the Lord
 2. The long-awaited Messiah would soon arrive
 - a. And John the Baptist, through his message of repentance and returning back to God, would prepare the hearts of the people, for the arrival of their King
 - i. After 400 years of silence, this was the message that God had for his people
 1. An old priest, and his aging wife, barren into their old age, would have a son
 2. And this son would turn many of the children of Israel back to their God
 - c. Just think for a moment... how would you react to such a message?
 - i. It’s hard to say, isn’t it?
 1. We would hope that, in a similar situation, we would respond as Abraham did, right?

- a. Look back in your worship guide at the passage Carleigh read for us earlier from Romans 4...
 - i. *¹⁸In hope, Abraham believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."*
- b. Abraham was FULLY convinced that God was able to do what He had promised
 - i. He didn't waiver in unbelief
- c. Isn't that the response we would all LONG to have?
 - i. Isn't that the response that we would expect from a righteous and faithful priest like Zechariah?
 - 1. Let's look at our passage for this morning, Luke 1:18-25, and we'll see how Zechariah responded

2. Luke 1:18-25

- a. *¹⁸And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰And 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." ²¹And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²²And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. ²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵"Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."*
 - i. Zechariah had forgotten, hadn't he?
 - 1. In this moment in which he must have been full of all sorts of emotions, from fear to excitement to apprehension, Zechariah had forgotten about Abraham
 - a. He had forgotten that God had already proven to His people that NOTHING was impossible for Him
 - b. And so Zechariah questioned Gabriel's message from God
 - i. Even more important to note, HE DID NOT BELIEVE the words that Gabriel had spoken
 - 2. It's hard to tell from the text what Gabriel's tone was in his reply
 - a. We can't tell if he was angry with Zechariah, or sad, or maybe even dumbfounded that Zechariah didn't believe him
 - i. We don't know how Gabriel sounded in his reply
 - b. But we do know that there were immediate and drastic consequences to Zechariah's unbelief
 - ii. Because Zechariah did not believe God's promises, God made him unable to speak... for the next NINE months
 - 1. If you look down at verse 62, its very likely that Zechariah was made deaf as well, as Luke tells us that the people had to use sign language to ask him what he wanted his baby boy to be named

- a. So for NINE months, Zechariah would be both deaf and mute, because of his unbelief
 - b. That's hard for us to fathom, right?
 - i. Sure, Zechariah should have had more faith
 - 1. As a priest of the Lord, he should have remembered Abraham's example
 - 2. He shouldn't have waived in unbelief
 - 2. But this was a pretty unexpected encounter
 - a. Zechariah just thought he was going into the Temple to burn some incense and say some prayers
 - b. He didn't expect an angel to come and speak to him
 - i. He certainly didn't expect to be told that God was going to give them a son, and that this son would prepare the way for the Messiah!
 - ii. In our hearts, we might say, "Couldn't Gabriel cut him a little slack, considering the circumstances???"
- b. But friends, this is the seriousness of unbelief
 - i. From Gabriel's response, we see that Zechariah didn't just have a moment of doubt or hesitation
 - 1. But instead, he DID NOT BELIEVE that what Gabriel had told him was possible
 - 2. God had just given to Zechariah a wonderful promise, and Zechariah chose not to believe
 - a. And again, the consequences were immediate
 - b. And the consequences were serious
 - i. After hearing God speak for the first time in four hundred years, Zechariah would spend the next nine months in utter silence
3. Which brings us to the question, why is unbelief – even just a momentary lapse of belief in the midst of extraordinary circumstances – why is unbelief SUCH a big deal?
 - a. In his commentary on this passage, the 17th century theologian, Albert Barnes, said this:
 - i. "There is no sin in the sight of God more aggravated than unbelief. When God speaks; man should believe; God speaks only truth, and we should believe Him. God speaks only what is for our good, and it is right that we should suffer if we do not credit what He says."
 - 1. We see in this statement three reasons for WHY the sin of unbelief is the root of all other sins
 - a. We should believe the words of God simply because He is God
 - b. We should believe the words of God because God ONLY speaks truth
 - c. We should believe the words of God because God ONLY speaks what is for our good
4. So, first, we should believe the words of God simply because He is God
 - a. My friends, this is no mere book, just like any other good book we might have on our bookshelves
 - i. This is God's revelation of Himself to mankind
 - 1. This is God graciously giving to sinful man a written explanation of who He is, and how He has ordained the events of the world all throughout history, and how He will bring all things to fulfillment according to His sovereign design
 - a. God, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come
 - b. God, who with a word commanded that the entire universe come into existence in a span of just six days... and it did
 - c. God, who formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life

- d. God, who exists eternally as the 3-in-1 God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - e. God, through whom and for whom ALL things are held together
2. THIS God... has spoken!
- a. He has spoken to us through His Word, the Holy Scriptures
 - i. Every word of this book has been breathed out by Him
 - ii. Every word of this book has been written by men who spoke from God, carried along by the Holy Spirit
 - iii. Every word of this book is God's revelation of Himself to His creation
 - 1. And if we will not believe the words that God Himself has spoken, then we are indeed the greatest of fools
 - 2. As God proclaims in Isaiah 45:22-23
 - a. *²²Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. ²³By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'*
 - iv. We believe the words of God... because He is God, and there is no other!
5. Second, we should believe the words of God because God ONLY speaks truth
- a. Again, in Isaiah 45, but now in verses 18-19, God says,
 - i. *¹⁸'I am the LORD, and there is no other. ¹⁹I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.*
 - 1. There is no darkness or deception in the words that God speaks
 - a. By His own declaration, he says to us, "I, the Lord, speak the truth!"
 - b. In Numbers 23, as God speaks through the pagan priest, Balaam, he says this in verse 19,
 - i. *¹⁹God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*
 - 1. My friends, God is not like us
 - a. He does not lie in order to protect His reputation
 - b. He does not lie in order to manipulate things for His own good
 - c. He does not lie in order to cover up a mistake or a bad decision
 - 2. God is not man, that he should lie
 - a. If He has said, He WILL do it!
 - b. If He has spoken, He WILL fulfill it!
 - c. Jesus affirms this truth for us in John 17:17, as he prays to his Father for all who would follow after him,
 - i. *¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word IS truth.*
 - 1. Every promise contained within this Book WILL be fulfilled
 - a. Every blessing... every judgment... EVERYTHING written in this Book WILL come to pass
 - i. For the Lord speaks the truth
 - ii. His Word IS truth
 - iii. And therefore, we should believe EVERY word we read in His Word
6. And third, we should believe the words of God because God ONLY speaks what is for our GOOD
- a. We heard just a few minutes ago that ALL Scripture is breathed out by God
 - i. Every word of this book comes from Him
 - b. But Paul goes on to say in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that,

i. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

1. Obviously, Paul is not talking about a financial profit in this passage
 - a. The word that he uses for *profitable* is a word that literally means, “heaping things up in order to gain an advantage”
 - b. In modern-day language, we might say that we’re “stacking the deck in our favor”
 - i. To use a sports example to illustrate this, our oldest son, Joshua, plays football for the NOAH Jaguars
 1. This is a team made up of all homeschool students
 2. In recent years, this team has been ranked one of the top homeschool football teams in the nation
 - a. That’s a pretty amazing accomplishment
 - c. But occasionally, in order to push them harder to make them a better team in the homeschool league, they’ll play against public school teams – sometimes REALLY good public school teams
 - i. This past season, the JV team went up against one of the Bixby JV teams, and it was not pretty
 1. I think the final score was sixty-something to seven?
 - a. Our boys had NO chance in this game
 - b. Bixby holds the state record for the longest winning streak in high school football, at 58 games
 - c. They have a state-of-the-art training facility, a whole roster of top-notch coaches, and more and more world class athletes moving into the district so they can play on their team
 2. Compared to our homeschool team – as good as they were – Bixby’s advantages were heaped up high over ours
 2. In a much more eternally significant way, that is how God has heaped things up in His Word for OUR good!
 - a. And notice what Paul says...
 - i. It’s not just the nice, happy promises in the Bible that are profitable for us
 1. It is ALSO the words that reprove and convict us
 2. It is ALSO the words that sometimes painfully correct us
 3. It is ALSO the words that train us, through discipline and hard work and perseverance
 - ii. ALL Scripture is profitable for us
 - iii. ALL Scripture, even the hard passages that no one likes, are for our GOOD
 1. For God, through His Word, has stacked the deck in our favor
 2. He has heaped up a compilation of 66 books
 - a. 1,189 chapters
 - b. 31,102 verses
 - i. And it is ALL for our GOOD!
 - c. So do you see?
 - i. The God who has created the heavens and the earth, and every creature on the earth, and all of mankind... has spoken

1. He has given us the Holy Scriptures
 - a. Every word in this Book is TRUE
 - b. And every word in this Book is GOOD
 - ii. So what does it say about us when we choose NOT to believe His Word?
 1. Well, it says that we still have a lot of the sin of Adam and Eve still residing in our flesh, doesn't it?
7. Think back to the beginning of our Bibles
- a. In Genesis 1 and 2, we have the beautiful and amazing account of the creation of all things
 - i. The creation of light
 - ii. The creation of the heavens and the earth
 - iii. The creation of the dry lands and the oceans and the plants and trees
 - iv. The creation of the sun and the moon and the stars
 - v. The creation of the fish of the seas, and the birds of the air
 - vi. The creation of the livestock and beasts of the earth, and the culmination of all of God's work – the creation of man in His own image
 1. God looked upon all that He had made, and He saw that it was good
 2. He looked upon the pinnacle of His creation, Adam and Eve, and he saw that it was all VERY good
 - a. So he placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to work and be fruitful and to exist for His glory
 - b. He gave them rule and reign over everything in the Garden, except for one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
 - i. Everything else in the garden would bring them life
 - ii. Only this one tree, would bring death
 - b. And then, in chapter 3, everything changes
 - i. The serpent, the great deceiver, Satan, enters into the garden
 1. And what were his first words to Adam and Eve?
 - a. *"Did God REALLY say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the Garden?'"*
 - i. But that's not what God said, was it?
 - ii. God had given them the freedom to eat from ALL the trees in the Garden – even the tree of life
 1. But they were NOT to eat from just ONE tree
 - iii. So we see, right from the start, that Satan is planting the seed of unbelief in Adam and Eve's heart
 2. Eve tries to respond, but even she begins to get things wrong as she says,
 - a. *"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"*
 - i. I don't know why Eve added the part about not touching the tree
 1. Maybe Adam didn't teach Eve adequately regarding this one restriction
 2. Maybe this was Eve's "inner Pharisee" trying to guard God's law by adding her own to it
 3. We don't know why she alters the command, but she does
 3. And then Satan goes into his full attack
 - a. In verses 4 and 5, he says to Eve
 - i. ⁴"You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
 - b. Satan planted the seed of unbelief in Eve's mind

- i. He watered it with his words of cunning and deceitfulness
- ii. But let there be no doubt about it – it was Eve who gave in to the temptation
 - 1. When she saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was to be desired to make one wise, Eve took of the fruit, and she ate
 - 2. And verse 6 tells us that Adam was right there with her, and he ate as well
 - a. They BOTH broke the law of God
 - b. And through their rebellion against His command, sin entered the world
 - i. And death would be the consequence of this sin

c. How did this come to be?

- i. How, in the midst of such beauty and perfection and freedom, could Adam and Eve choose to sin against God?
 - 1. It all began with UNBELIEF
 - a. Instead of believing that God was God, and there was no other, they leapt at the chance to become just like Him
 - b. Instead of believing that God only spoke what was TRUE, they listened to Satan’s words and bought into the idea that God was lying to them
 - c. Instead of believing in God’s great goodness that He had shown to them by giving them the freedom to eat from every tree in the garden but one, Adam and Eve doubted God’s goodness, and they believed that He was selfishly holding something back from them
 - i. Sin entered the world on that day because Adam and Eve chose not to believe in the promises of God
 - ii. Sin entered the world on that day because of unbelief
 - iii. And sin remains in our flesh, even still today, because of our own unbelief
 - 1. Which brings us back to the quote I read at the beginning of the sermon from John Piper
 - a. Let me read it to you again...

d. “All sins come from unbelief in the promises of God. All the sinful states of our hearts are owing to unbelief in God’s super-abounding willingness and ability to work for us in every situation of life so that everything turns out for our good. Anxiety, misplaced shame, indifference, regret, covetousness, envy, lust, bitterness, impatience, despondency, pride — these are all sprouts from the root of unbelief in the promises of God.”

- i. Why did Adam and Eve sin in the garden?
 - 1. Because they did not believe the promises of God
- ii. Why did Zechariah sin in the Holy Place of the Temple?
 - 1. Because he did not believe the promises of God
- iii. Why do WE choose to sin, giving in to the desires and temptations that reside within us?
 - 1. Because, in those moments, we are choosing to NOT believe in the promises of God
 - a. In those moments, we are giving in to the sin of unbelief
 - b. And, as was the case for Zechariah, there are often painful consequences that come as a result of our sin of unbelief

8. Let’s think about it on a practical level

- a. When we run into financial difficulty, what is our response?
 - i. Maybe we lost our job, or we had some unexpected expense come out of nowhere

1. And when we look at our bank account, all of a sudden we aren't sure how we're going to make ends meet
 - a. What goes on in our hearts in those moments?
- ii. Jesus had this to say in Matthew 6:25-33
 1. *²⁵Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
- iii. God has heaped up INCREDIBLE promises for His children regarding our material provision
 1. So, when we run into hard times financially, will we TRUST in those promises?
 - a. Or will we fall into the sin of unbelief, and allow worry and anxiety and fear to pull us away from our Father?
- b. Or what if we begin to have health problems, and we get a diagnosis from the doctor that knocks us off our feet?
 - i. Or maybe, as our brothers and sisters experience all around the world, our afflictions in our body aren't a result of disease, but of persecution and physical attack?
 1. What will we do when, for whatever reason, these earthly bodies begin to fail us?
 2. What goes on in our hearts in those moments?
- ii. Paul had this to say in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
 1. *¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*
 - a. Did you hear that, Christians?
 - b. Our light and momentary afflictions are preparing for us an ETERNAL weight of glory, beyond all comparison!
 - i. So as our outer self wastes away, will we trust in this amazing promise that God has heaped up on our behalf?
 - ii. Or will we fall into the sin of unbelief, and allow anger or bitterness or resentment to pull us away from our Father?
- c. We could go on and on with these practical examples, couldn't we?
 - i. But the bottom line is the same for every trial, every hardship, every affliction
 1. Will we choose to find rest and peace and comfort in the promises of God?
 2. Or, will we choose to NOT believe the promises of His Word, and instead fall into the sin of unbelief?
 - a. The consequences of choosing the latter are tragic, my friends
 - i. We know this, right?

1. We've all been in the place where we've been consumed with fear or anxiety
 2. We've all been in the place where we've been eaten up with anger and bitterness
 3. We've all been in the place where we've been overwhelmed with guilt and shame
- ii. These are the consequences of our unbelief
 1. EVERY sin in our life sprouts from the root of unbelief in the promises of God
- d. Zechariah experienced this firsthand, as his sin of unbelief caused him to be deaf and mute for nine months
- i. But God's discipline against Zechariah isn't the end of the passage, is it?
 1. For verses 24 and 25 tell us this...
 - a. *²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵"Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."*
 - ii. Brothers and sisters in Christ, when we fall into the sin of unbelief, know this:
 1. Because God LOVES you, He will discipline you for your sin
 - a. That discipline will be painful
 - b. But that discipline will be for our good
 - iii. But know this as well:
 1. If you are truly a child of God, your momentary unbelief has no affect whatsoever on His promises!
 - a. Zechariah didn't believe that God would give them a son, but God still did, didn't He?
 - i. Elizabeth, barren in her old age, conceived a child who would prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Messiah
 - ii. And God took away her reproach that she had endured FOR DECADES
 2. Friends this is the message of the Scriptures:
 - a. The promises of God do not rest on our belief – they rest on HIS faithfulness
 - i. They rest on HIS grace... and HIS mercy... and HIS love for us
 - ii. In light of all of these incredible promises, may we fight HARD against the sin of unbelief in our own hearts
 1. May we look to the Word of God, and trust that every word of it is TRUE, and for our GOOD!
 2. And in those moments when we start to fall, may we cry out like the man in Mark 9:24, *"I do believe; help my unbelief!"*