

Luke 1:5-7

"Righteous before God"

January 7, 2024

1. As we are still introducing the Gospel of Luke, we need to address a concept that helps us to read the Bible rightly
 - a. The concept is this...
 - i. While the Bible is fully sufficient to point us toward Jesus Christ, and to make us wise in our salvation, it is NOT exhaustive in its content
 1. This makes sense when we stop to think about it
 - a. God has given us everything we need in His Holy Word
 - i. We have everything we need to know about Him, revealed to us in the Scriptures
 - ii. We have everything we need to know about Christ and the Holy Spirit, revealed to us in the Scriptures
 - iii. We have everything we need to know about our sin, and our need for a Savior, and how to live a life of godliness through Jesus Christ
 1. The Bible is FULLY sufficient for us
 2. But it is not exhaustive
 - a. In regard to science, for many centuries, when people only had the Bible to look to for instruction, they believed that the sun orbited around the earth, because that was the language the Scriptures used
 - i. It wasn't until Copernicus came along 1500 years after Christ, that it was discovered that, no, actually the earth orbits around the sun
 1. Does this mean that the Bible is in error?
 - a. No! It simply means that the Bible was not meant to be exhaustive when it comes to scientific knowledge
 - b. In regard to philosophy, if you just read the Scriptures, you might get the idea that the Middle East, and then the Greco-Roman Empire were the only major centers of learning and education and advanced civilizations
 - i. But the reality is that in China and eastern Asia, these fields were also thriving under the influence of men like Confucius, and others
 1. Does this mean that the Bible is in error?
 - a. No! Again, it simply means that the Bible was not meant to be exhaustive when it comes to fields such as philosophy or education
 - c. This same principle applies to World History as well
 - i. If we were to just read the Scriptures, we end the Old Testament with Israel returning from exile, the Temple being rebuilt under Ezra, and the walls of Jerusalem being rebuilt under Nehemiah
 1. We get the impression that the land of Israel was once again returning to the way that God had intended, and that things were getting back to normal for His people
 - a. And we would be WRONG in making this assumption
 - b. For, when the Scriptures pick back up in the Gospels of the New Testament, we're all of a sudden bombarded by a TON of questions!
 - i. Who is this King Herod?
 - ii. Who are these Pharisees and Sadducees that Jesus keeps running into problems with?
 - iii. What are the synagogues that Jesus goes to?
 - iv. What are Roman soldiers doing in the land of Judea?
 - v. What in the world has been going on since the Old Testament ended???
 1. When we begin to ask these questions, and start to do some research on our own, we very quickly come to this realization...

- a. There is almost four HUNDRED years of historical events that ARE NOT RECORDED in the Scriptures
 - i. And what was happening in the world and in the land of Israel during these four hundred years matters GREATLY in our understanding of the Scriptures
- vi. So why would these four hundred years NOT be included in our Bibles?
 - 1. Well, one reason is, for the original audience of the Scriptures, these 400 years were not ancient history to them
 - a. They were very real, and very recent times for them
 - i. They were immersed in these times, and they were living out the consequences of the previous four centuries
 - 1. So, on a human level, when Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John sat down to compile their Gospel accounts, they didn't need to include a bunch of historical information about the previous 400 years, for much of that history would be very familiar to most of the people of that time
- c. But, on a deeper, more spiritual level, we can try to explain this in three different ways...
 - i. The first is simply that God is God
 - 1. The Bible is ultimately HIS revelation of Himself to His people
 - 2. And 2 Peter 1:3-4 tells us this...
 - a. *³His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*
 - i. So through the precious promises of the Scriptures we have been given the knowledge of Him who called us
 - ii. And through that knowledge, ALL THINGS pertaining to life and godliness have been granted to us
 - b. So, according to God's wisdom, what we have in His Word is EXACTLY what we need for a life of godliness, as we abide in Christ and flee from the corruption of our sinful desires
 - i. While the events of those 400 years are important, the knowledge of them IS NOT NECESSARY for our salvation
 - ii. The second way to explain the omission of these four hundred years of historical events is that they actually WERE NOT omitted... they were just included as prophecy long before they ever happened
 - 1. The book of Daniel is where we go to in order to find our support for this explanation
 - a. In this book, of course we have the great stories of Daniel in the Lions' Den, and Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego
 - b. But we also have some pretty incredible prophetic visions that were given to Daniel during the time of his captivity in Babylon and Persia
 - c. We don't have the time to fully unpack these visions this morning
 - i. You can just write down the chapter numbers in your notes, and go and look at them later in your own time
 - d. In chapter 2, we have Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a huge statue, with a golden head, chest and arms of silver, legs of bronze, and feet of iron and clay
 - i. Daniel interprets this dream for Nebuchadnezzar, and explains to him that he is the golden head of the statue, and after him will come three more kingdoms, each represented by the different materials in the statue
 - e. In chapter 7, Daniel had his own dream of four great beasts – a lion with eagles' wings, a bear lying on its side eating the ribs of his prey, a leopard with four heads and four wings on its back, and a terrifying beast with iron teeth and ten horns
 - i. An angel comes to him and tells him the same thing Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar – these four beasts are four kingdoms

- f. In chapter 8, Daniel has another vision, this time of just two beasts – a ram with one horn on its head higher than the other, and a one-horned goat who flew quickly over the land, devouring everything in its path
 - i. But in his strength, the one horn of the goat was broken, and four smaller horns came from his head
 - ii. Out of these four horns, one horn grew exceedingly strong, and he would eventually trample the sanctuary of God
- g. So what is going on with all of these statues and beasts and horns?!
 - i. Well, thankfully, the angel Gabriel comes to Daniel to explain these things to him
 - 1. And the detail Gabriel gives is so accurate that many scholars have said that there is no way Daniel could have been written during the time of Israel's exile
 - a. It had to have been written MUCH later, for how could anyone know these things?
 - i. Of course we know the answer to that question, don't we?
 - ii. For God sees the end from the beginning, and it is a small thing for him to prophesy what is to come
 - b. So what is the explanation given to Daniel?
- h. Gabriel explains to Daniel that the ram in this vision is the kingdom of Medo-Persia
 - i. These two kingdoms combined to defeat the kingdom of Babylon, which was represented in Daniel's earlier vision by the lion with eagles' wings
 - ii. But Persia would eventually become the stronger of the two kingdoms, which was represented by the higher horn on the head of the ram
 - iii. Gabriel then goes on to give this amazing prophecy regarding the one-horned goat
 - 1. In incredibly specific language, Gabriel names this goat as the king of Greece, which means that the one horn is none other than Alexander the Great!
 - a. If you know your world history, you know that Alexander the Great rose to power very quickly, and as he sought to expand his Empire, he conquered nations with exceedingly great speed
 - i. This is the reason why the goat in Daniel's vision seems to fly across the land, devouring everything in its path
 - b. But, in the might of his great strength, everything fell apart for Alexander
 - i. His soldiers grew weary and threatened to rebel against him
 - ii. And, on his return trip back to Greece, Alexander died, possibly poisoned by his own men
 - iii. So the great horn was broken
 - c. And out of the great horn, four new horns would arise
 - i. Well, in world history, we know that after Alexander's death, his empire was split into four regions, each ruled by one of his four generals
 - d. Out of these four generals, one family, the Seleucids, would rise to power in the area that included the land of Judea
 - i. And out of the Seleucids, one man would emerge in power, Antiochus IV

1. In the book of Esther, we learn that there were Jewish settlements in all of the 127 provinces throughout Persia
 - a. So how did these Jews worship?
 - b. How did they continue in learning the law, and in keeping their traditions, even when they were far away from the newly rebuilt Temple?
 - i. Well, they began to build places of gathering in their communities
 1. In the Greek language, these places of gathering were known as Synagogues
 2. These synagogues were overseen by the priests and rabbis who lived in those communities
 3. Many of the Jewish people would still travel to Jerusalem for the bigger celebrations, but for the most part, the local synagogue became the primary place of learning for the dispersed Jews
2. But then, with the rise of Alexander the Great came a new problem for the Jewish people
 - a. Although we talked earlier of the Greek Empire, the scholars who trained and educated Alexander weren't so much interested in creating an Empire, as they were in spreading what they called the Greek civilization
 - i. As Alexander conquered the nations, these scholars would come behind him, educating the people in the Greek culture and Greek language
 - ii. As a result of this emphasis, what used to be a bunch of solitary countries with their own beliefs and languages, soon became unified under the banner of the new Greek civilization
 - iii. As this Greek civilization spread into the places where the Jews lived, they now had a choice to make...
 1. Would they continue to hold onto the Jewish language and traditions, keeping them pure and unstained from the pagan influence of the Greeks?
 2. Or, would they keep their religion and way of life, and improve upon it by incorporating the best aspects of the Greek culture?
 - b. In the areas where the Jews had been dispersed during the time of the Persians, many of these Jews readily adopted the new language and way of life, and they became known as Hellenistic Jews
 - i. But as you got closer to Jerusalem, the opposition to these new ways grew much stronger
 1. And out of this disagreement, two main groups arose in power
 - a. The first were the Sadducees
 - i. These were wealthy, aristocratic Jews who saw great political benefit in adopting the Hellenistic practices of the Greeks
 - ii. This would also lead them to eventually side with the politicians of Rome, as the Roman Empire took control of all of the places Alexander had conquered
 - iii. The Sadducees upheld the Torah on a superficial level, but they had little use for spiritual ideas, such as the supernatural, or the afterlife
 - iv. In their hearts, they loved wealth and greed and power – and they would compromise greatly to attain these things
 - b. The second group that emerged during this time were the Pharisees
 - i. The Pharisees were extremely devoted to the Torah, and they strongly believed that the people of God

- should stay pure and unstained from the ways of the world
 - ii. They were known as the “Hasidim,” or the “pious ones”
 - iii. They were so pious about the protection of the Jewish way of life that they would eventually begin to add more and more laws to the Torah
 - iv. In their mind, they were protecting God’s people by “fencing off” HIS laws with laws of their own
 - v. As a result, the Pharisees were much more respected by the traditional Jews, and they were seen as the true men of God in their time
 - ii. As the Pharisees and the Sadducees were both growing in power, the Roman Empire was growing as well
 - 1. In response to the defiling of the Temple by Antiochus IV, the Jews revolted under the leadership of a man named Judas Maccabee, whose name meant “Judas, the hammer”
 - a. The Seleucid forces were defeated by the Jews, but their victory would be short lived
 - b. Rome would quickly come into power, and their armies would eventually make their way to the land of Israel
 - i. And, in the decades before the birth of Christ, the Roman senate, not wanting to deal with the rebellious Jews in Judea, appointed a ruthless man to rule over them, King Herod I
 - 1. Herod solidified his influence over the Jewish people by supposedly converting to Judaism, and by restoring and expanding the Temple built during Ezra’s day
 - 2. But his true colors were seen in the fact that he installed a new high priest every year, to ensure that the high priest remained loyal to him, and not to the people
- iii. And in the midst of all of this, the Pharisees and Sadducees continued to war against each other for power
 - 1. The Jewish people fought with one another over the new ways vs. the old
 - 2. The political leadership of Judea was filled with treason and deception and bloodshed
 - a. The Temple of God was rebuilt, full of beauty and splendor and magnificence
 - b. But the glory of the Lord, had not returned
- iv. Yet, in spite of all of this evil and godlessness, there were still SOME who truly feared God
 - 1. Men and women who held tightly to the commandments and the statues of the Lord – not just outwardly like the Pharisees, but inwardly, in their hearts
 - 2. Men and women who longed for the consolation of Israel, who longed for the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy of the return of the glory of the Lord, who longed for the fulfillment of all of God’s precious promises to His people
 - 3. Men and women who were righteous before God
- e. This is the setting in which we find ourselves as Luke opens his account of the life of Jesus
 - i. We learned last week about who Luke was
 - 1. We learned a little bit about who Theophilus might have been
 - 2. And we learned A LOT about WHY Luke wrote his Gospel
 - a. So that we might be certain about the things we have been taught
 - ii. And then Luke begins his narrative, starting in verse 5 of chapter 1...
 - 1. *⁵In 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. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

- a. In the days of evil King Herod, when the Pharisees and the Sadducees fought for power, when the political rulers were shrewd and deceitful, when the Temple was still empty of the glory of God, faithful priests still carried on their duties in humble obedience to the Lord
 - i. One of these was a man named Zechariah, and his equally righteous wife, Elizabeth
 - ii. Way back in the day when King David crowned his son, Solomon, to be the next king, David also divided the priesthood into 24 divisions, who would all share in the duties required in the soon-to-be-built Temple
 - 1. The eighth division of priests was the division of Abijah, mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:10
 - a. It was to this division that Zechariah belonged
 - 2. And as we're introduced to Zechariah and Elizabeth, just let the weight of what Luke says sink in
 - a. In the midst of all of the godlessness and righteousness of those days in Judea, Zechariah and Elizabeth were seen as blameless, righteous before God
 - i. Yet in all of their righteousness, Elizabeth was barren in her old age
 - 1. That's not what we would expect to hear, is it?
 - a. Surely, the Lord would have blessed this godly couple with an abundance of children, a reward for their faithfulness to Him?
 - b. Surely, as they ministered faithfully before God as His people continued to turn away from Him, God would bless them with the fruit children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren?
 - c. But that's not the story, is it?
 - f. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God, when so many others were not
 - i. Zechariah and Elizabeth walked blamelessly in all the commands and statutes of the Lord, when so many others did not
 - ii. And while they likely watched so many around them enjoy the births of their children, and then their grandchildren, and maybe even their great-grandchildren, Zechariah and Elizabeth did not
 - 1. For Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years
2. My friends, all of these things that we have learned about this morning should serve as far more to us than just a bunch of background information
 - a. ALL of it should serve to teach us what it looks like to live a righteous life before God, even as we live in a land of UNrighteousness!
 - i. Even though the players are different, the game is still the same for us today, isn't it?
3. And we all have a choice as to which role we play in all of it
 - a. You could choose to be a modern-day Sadducee
 - i. We see this type of church-goer growing in rapid numbers all around us, as we see the rise of Christian nationalism within our churches
 - 1. These are men and women who have wedded the church to a certain political party, or a certain politician
 - 2. If we support so-and-so, they will make sure the church is always taken care of, always protected, and always has a voice
 - a. It doesn't matter so much whether or not this person or party is a person or party of character or integrity
 - b. What matters is, can they keep THE CHURCH in power
 - i. And the problem is, in order to align ourselves with these people, the church must compromise
 - ii. We must agree to adapt to the ways of the world around us
 - 1. We must use their language, and adopt their customs and traditions

2. Like the Hellenistic Jews that lived throughout the dispersion during the advancement of Greek civilization, we must blend in
3. And the Sadducees will lead the way
- ii. But remember what we talked about last week regarding Theophilus?
 1. Luke didn't want Theophilus to be certain about the things he had been taught so that Theophilus could keep his wealth and status and privilege
 - a. He wanted Theophilus to be certain so that he would be prepared to endure the coming persecution
 - i. For ALL who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus WILL be persecuted
 1. There are many Sadducees in the church today, striving for political power and influence
 2. Compromising the truth of God's Word in exchange for ease and comfort and safety
 3. You could choose to be a Sadducee
- b. Or, you could choose to be a modern-day Pharisee
 - i. These types of people also abound in our churches today, don't they?
 1. In churches all across our land, you can go sit and hear a sermon all about how YOU can be a better person
 - a. Do this, and don't do that, and you will be saved
 - i. Make sure you dress a certain way, talk a certain way, and definitely make sure you tithe each week
 1. If you do these things, God will love you
 2. If you don't do these things, God may still love you, but your life will be miserable
 - a. So check all the right boxes, whether you really want to do them in your heart or not
 - b. And as you're checking those boxes, make sure you post about it on social media for everyone to see
 - c. How else will everyone know how godly of a person you are?
 2. Pharisees abound in our churches today, for we have exchanged the gospel of God's grace for a gospel of moralism
 - a. Jesus is just the cherry on top of my already awesome life, right?
 - i. I bet he's really glad I picked him to be on my team!
 1. My friends, you could choose to be a modern-day Pharisee
 2. You could choose to be a modern-day Sadducees
 3. You could choose to be like the countless others who simply go along with whatever sounds best to them in the moment
- c. Or, you could choose to live a righteous life before God
 - i. You could choose to walk blamelessly in all of His commands and statutes
 1. Not for reward or gain in this lifetime
 2. But simply out of humble faith in who God is
 - a. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God
 - i. Blameless in following His commands
 - ii. And they were barren, even into their old age
 1. And even though they were filled with joy at the birth of their one and only son, they didn't really get much time to enjoy him, did they?
 - a. For, as we'll see in the weeks to come, John the Baptist was set apart for the Lord, even from his mother's womb
 - b. And, if they were still alive to see it, they would look on helplessly as their son, barely thirty years old, was executed by a deranged king

- b. Yet in all of this, Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God
- d. As we close this morning, turn with me in your Bibles to 1 John 3:1-7
 - i. *¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.*
 - ii. Based off of what we read in the Scriptures, I think its safe to assume that the Jewish world in that day probably didn't TRULY know Zechariah and Elizabeth
 - 1. Zechariah and Elizabeth didn't compromise the truth of God's Word for the sake of political gain
 - a. They didn't have a hypocritical, outward religion based upon their own good works
 - b. They didn't just follow the broad path that everyone else was travelling
 - 2. Zechariah and Elizabeth placed their hope in the promises of God
 - a. And through their faith in God's promises, they were pure
 - b. Through their faith in all that He had said and all that He had done, they were righteous
 - i. Friends, do you know this kind of faith?
 - 1. Christ would become the fulfillment of all that Zechariah and Elizabeth hoped for
 - 2. And he is the fulfillment of all that we hope for today as well
 - a. The only way we can be righteous before God is by abiding in His Son
 - i. Regardless of reward... regardless of comfort... regardless of recognition
 - ii. Place your hope in Jesus
 - iii. For everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself, as Christ is pure!