

Living By Faith

We cannot change the past, so what is its importance? Some people try to live in the past because they cannot cope with the present and have little hope in the future. Some people live in the dream of the future because they struggle to live in the present and have little use for the past. For Christians the past gives the foundation, framework and application found in the Bible for the present and gives great hope for the future - for God is in control of eternity past to eternity future. To live in the present requires knowing God through the Scriptures and faithfully living them out in our daily life. Knowing the Scriptures and committing to live them provides the only true path for living in this broken world.

Through the history of the past we have seen Israel came close to God and then it fell away again and again throughout the Old Testament. History shows us because of the abuses of a king the United States revolted and was founded on many Christian principles and our laws are based on the 10 Commandments, but over the last 200 years America has moved away from these principles and is now hurling through history like a rocket without a rudder. Even so, we can have peace because we know God and by knowing God and believing in God we receive His peace in the present and for our future.

It is important to know the scriptures because by them we know God and live by his rules, not mans. As Jesus said, ¹³“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14) From the beginning of history choosing God over the world has never been the easy way and it is the remnant that strives for, prays for and

commits to live in faith apart from worldly values. The remnant believers travel life's road by the hard way through the narrow gate that leads to eternal life. Luke's record of the events and people surrounding the birth of Christ is not only the story of these events but it is also meant as instruction for the living in faith to every generation that followed. It is God's instruction for each of us concerning living faithfully as God's elect.

The Remnant

In Luke's Gospel account we first read of Zechariah, a man of status, a priest of tribe of Levi and of the temple. All his training and study did not keep him from doubt. However, God answered his doubt and he learned and traveled a path of faithfulness for more than 9 months until his son John was born. As the spiritual head of his marriage he taught his lesson learned to Elizabeth and increased her faith for becoming pregnant and giving birth to the prophet John who would herald the coming of Christ. They knew not the future but lived by faith and were obedient to God's calling. Would Elizabeth had desired to give birth to a son if she had known that because of John's faith and obedience to God's calling he would lose his head? Maybe or maybe not, but Luke tells us that even though they did not know the future they lived in faith because they believed. Let me ask about your faith, are you living in doubt as Zechariah began his journey or are you living faithfully to the only Savior of the world? What does it mean to live faithfully? This morning we will see Luke lay out evidence of faithfulness and then we will finish with these elements that indicate one is living faithfully.

Back to Luke, he next introduces Mary and even though she was taken by surprise to see an angel of God before her – she knew no doubt and accepted the will of God by faith because she believed and was obedient. Go back a page Luke's gospel account to chapter 1, verse 38 where we observe Mary's faith in her reply to Gabriel,

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) Upon Mary’s return to Nazareth after spending time with Elizabeth her physical condition would no longer allow her to hide her pregnancy. Even though Joseph would have been heartbroken thinking his betrothed was pregnant by someone else he loved her and decided to put Mary away quietly. Before he could act the angel of God came Joseph and he accepted the will of God. Matthew’s account says, Joseph “**did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.**” (Matthew 1:24-25) Joseph spent his life living in faith of God’s promised Messiah and protecting Mary from the unkindness of people. Would Mary have agreed to give birth to Jesus knowing he would be crucified? Her lived out faith says, “Yes.” Would Joseph been willing to wed Mary and be the stepfather of Jesus if he had known for Jesus’ ministry to be launched he would have to die? His life lived says, “Yes.” Does your life lived give evidence of your faith? Is your answer to God, “Yes?”

God orchestrated the unfaithful rulers to make it necessary for Joseph and Mary to travel at the difficult time of her pregnancy to Bethlehem. God controlled the men and events of the unbelieving world and at the same time Joseph and Mary were faithful. These are wonderful examples of people living faithfully to God. But, how can we believe these events recorded by Luke are truth and these people lived out their faith as is written, after all they took place over 2000 years ago?

A basic legal principal put forth in the Bible and mostly followed to this day, except in politics, is that 2 or more witnesses establish the truth of a matter. Moses wrote God’s instructions, “**A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.**” (Deuteronomy 19:15) Matthew confirmed this principal as he recorded Jesus’ teaching, “**But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every**

charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” (Matthew 18:16) This principal was continued in our own judicial system.

Even though Israel thought the conditions were right for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah and felt his coming was at anytime, such an amazing claim that Jesus was the Messiah demanded multiple witnesses verify it. The first to give testimony to Jesus as the Christ were his parents. Joseph was righteous as verified by Matthew when he was made aware Mary had become pregnant, “Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” (Matthew 1:19) Mary’s righteousness is evident in her song of praise found in chapter 1, verse 46, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:46-47) Luke in chapter 2 confirms their righteousness 5 times by showing their commitment to the law of God.

Joseph and Mary are obedient to God’s law as we read in verse 21 of chapter 2, “at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Some have said there was no reason for Jesus to be circumcised since he was sinless. His parents knowing he was the Messiah should not have done this. However, again even though Jesus was sinless his parents lived by faith and fulfilled the law. Paul clarified this in his letter to the Galatians, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.” (Galatians 4:4) This made possible God’s plan for salvation as Paul stated, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) The birth of Christ fulfilled the law by those living faithfully and made the way for you to be righteous before God, not by fulfilling the law out of obligation, but by faith trusting in God. Unfaithfulness is disobedience and therefore sin. We cannot change yesterday, the question before each of us is will we live faithful this day?

Their faithful actions continued, reading beginning at verse 22, “And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.’) Setting apart the first-born was not for the purpose of priestly service, because priests came from the tribe of Levi and Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. Joseph and Mary were presenting Jesus to dedicate his life to God his Father. Being exempt from priestly duty required a redemption price to be paid for the first-born. Aaron in the Book of Numbers laid this out, where God said, “Everything that opens the womb of all flesh, whether man or beast, which they offer to the LORD, shall be yours. Nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. ¹⁶ And their redemption price (at a month old you shall redeem them) you shall fix at five shekels in silver.” (Numbers 18:15-16) In biblical times a shekel was worth about 5 days wages. This would mean in today’s value, using the median income of the State of New Mexico, parents should bring \$3005.00 to the church when they have their child dedicated. The money was used to help pay the expenses of the temple or today the church. Even though it does not state in Luke that Joseph and Mary paid the redemption price for Jesus, I believe by their examples of faithful living they would have sacrificed and paid it. So, here Joseph and Mary are in Bethlehem and most likely Joseph is doing carpenter work to pay their cost of living and they bring a month’s wages to Jesus’ dedication. Remember, the wise men had not arrived yet with their gifts, so to pay a month’s wages would have been a sacrifice. If the magi had already arrived and given their gift of gold, Joseph would have had the money to pay for the sacrifice of a lamb as the burnt offering instead of the pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. The magi gift of gold would be needed for Egypt.

Here again is a principal Luke gives us for today. Sacrificial giving back to the Lord is part of faithful living. Tithing is a principal of faith for Christian living. Do

you trust God and give back to Him for the work of his church's ministry? Do you give to the Lord with a glad and thankful heart? Jesus came to fulfill the law and is our example. Compromise is the way of the world, not of the life of a believer. Are you fulfilling the law of tithe, not out of obligation, but because of your love for Jesus and faith in God? God says keep most of what he provides, but give him at least 10%. Are you fulfilling the law and being faithful in giving at least 10% to God's church that you belong to?

Luke shows us that Joseph and Mary's obedience to the law of God is faithful throughout the narrative of Jesus' conception to birth. As with Zechariah and Elizabeth, Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary also [“were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.”](#) (Luke 1:6) It was their righteousness as observed in their obedience and living by faith that validates their testimony. My beloved what does your life validate? How righteous is your testimony?

Simeon

God is forever faithful and all his promises have either been fulfilled or will be fulfilled without variance. All of God's promises support his plan of salvation and the key promise was fulfilled in the birth of His Son, the Messiah. Those believing and living the promises of God, have always been a small number, they are the remnant. Despite the clear testimony and fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah only the remnant was prepared to recognize him when he arrived. Key among this remnant was Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Joseph and Mary, and the shepherds when they received the angelic pronouncement. Luke introduces the faithfulness of Simeon and Anna in verses 25 to 38. Both testify to Jesus as the Messiah and God's mission for his Son to the world. What is the value of their testimony?

We do not know much about Simeon. Here is what we do know or can infer; he lived in Jerusalem and was older in age by what we read in verses 26 and 29. His name means “God has heard” we know this by what Leah, Jacob’s wife, said, “ ‘Because the **LORD has heard** that I am hated, he has given me this son also.’ And she called his name Simeon.” (Genesis 29:33) Luke says in verse 25 Simeon was “**righteous and devout**” which is a statement loaded with meaning. Luke is saying Simeon is like Abraham for as we read, “**he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**” (Genesis 15:6) Simeon was another person given the Holy Spirit by God to reveal the truth of Jesus. He was “**waiting for the consolation of Israel, and ... the Lord’s Christ.**” (v.25-26) God had promised the deliverance of Israel in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Jesus was the fulfillment of these covenants. Simeon had been faithfully praying for this event. God “**revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.**” (v. 26) The problem was that beyond the remnant of believers in Israel the nation had become one of ritual instead of relationship with God. Israel lived by tradition instead of faith. My beloved may be never become a people of empty ritual and tradition! May we be people of faith living the Word of God!

Israel continues to be key in God’s plan of salvation. How then should we, as the saved children of God, be praying for Israel? In light of what Jesus said, “**So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**” (Matthew 24:15-16) Do we pray for the world to be turned upside down and Christ’s return or for Jews to come to know Jesus as their Messiah or for peace in the Middle East? I believe we pray for all of these if we are pray for God’s will be made known to both Jews and Christians.

Back to Simeon, Luke wants his readers to understand that those saved before the cross and Pentecost were saved in the same manner as everyone since and that is

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

During the Old Testament period the Holy Spirit by God’s grace was present *with* people to convict them of their sin, prompting their repentance, giving them spiritual life and wisdom, and this gave them faith and their faith brought them close to God. Today it is the same, but the Holy Spirit is God’s gift to all believers when they *believe in Jesus* as the Christ, but the Holy Spirit is no longer *with people* but resides *in people*. Simeon lived daily with the expectation of Jesus’s coming and we should be living with the daily expectation of his return. Paul spoke of the fulfillment of the prophets of the Old Testament when he said before King Agrippa, “Christ ... would proclaim light both to our people (*Jews*) and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:17) The prophet Isaiah revealed what God said of the Messiah, “I will give you (*the Messiah*) as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.” (Isaiah 42:6) Isaiah told Israel 700 years earlier that the Messiah was for all people and nations.

Simeon ends in verses 34 and 35 with a warning addressed to Mary, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” Simeon did not want Mary to be surprised when the Jewish leaders became hostile toward Jesus. Simeon did not give his warning to Joseph because by the time of Jesus’ ministry Joseph had died. Let me ask has anything changed? Has not the world in general always been hostile toward Christ? Is not the world growing more hostile towards Jesus? Simeon did not want the actions of people to take Mary by surprise and he does not want us who are living in the end times to be surprised either. Israel’s violent rejection of God’s Messiah would cause Mary pain and Simeon painted a picture of this pain when he told Mary, “a sword will pierce through your own soul” in verse 35. It is possible your soul will also be pierced

through for the cause of Christ. Will you remain faithful? The answer, like all the martyrs before us is “Yes” if you trust in God and believe in Christ!

Anna

³⁶ “And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel (fan·oo·ale), of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

What does it mean Anna was a prophetess? It does not mean she predicted the future. There are 5 female prophetess mentioned in the Old Testament - 4 good and 1 false. None were prophets with an ongoing or long-term ministry, but they spoke the word of God in specific times. Anna was a faithful woman and spent extended periods of time fasting and praying. She is a prophetess because she testified that the baby Jesus was the Messiah and her faithful life of service gave merit to her testimony.

Luke gives us details of Anna’s life to show she was a credible witness. Her faithfulness was life long, she served in the temple everyday and fasted and prayed for the redemption of Israel. She knew Jesus was their redemption. Her words of praise are not recorded but Luke says Anna “[began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.](#)” Anna’s praise closes out Luke’s account of Christ’s birth. When Luke writes, “[all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem](#)” he is referring to the believing remnant, those who believed the prophets and whose hearts were open to seeing the prophecies being fulfilled. Anna and those she spoke before, which included Joseph, Mary and Simeon, God blessed for their faithfulness. None of those present had seen the details of the coming of the Christ, yet they were faithful. They did not know the future but trusted God and

were committed to live the gospel by faith for the God's glory.

Us

For Christians, for you and me, the past gives the foundation, framework and application found in the Bible for living the present and gives great hope for our future - for God is in control of eternity past to eternity future. To live in the present requires knowing God through the Scriptures, Christ and the Spirit, and faithfully living as did Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, living out the gospel in our daily life. Knowing the Scriptures and committing to live them provides the only true path for living in this broken world. My beloved let us live as faithfully as the saints of the past and when we arrive in heaven we will hear our Lord says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21) Amen and amen!