

Text: Luke 1:5-25

Title: Zacharias and Gabriel

Truth: Gabriel announces John's arrival before he is conceived.

Date/Location: Sunday July 30, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

Luke begins his narrative at a good place in the days leading up to the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. These cousins were born six months apart in two unique situations.

I. Birth Announcement of John the Baptist, v. 5-17

A. It is interesting to observe that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were from the line of Aaron. They had no children, and they were old. The most important thing was that they were "righteous before God" and consequently they had good behavior. The phrase "righteous before God" means more than that their behavior was good or that they were "good people." It means that they were saved. They were believers. This is one of the great religious "conundrums," because Job asks, "how can a man be righteous before God (Job 9:2, also Bildad in 25:4)? Zacharias and Elizabeth shared the faith of their forefather Abraham, who believed in God, and God imputed that to Him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). They were not merely righteous before people. They were both righteous **before God**. According to His standard, based as it is on repentant faith, they were in good standing. You can experience that blessing as well. The entire teaching of the New Testament revolves around this idea that none is righteous (Rom. 3:10) but that people can be constituted as righteous in God's sight by faith in Christ, in Whom God justifies the sinner (Rom. 3:26).

B. There were priests at this time because the Law of Moses was in quite complete operation. Temple sacrifices were happening daily, incense offerings were happening twice daily, and worshippers offered prayer outside the temple throughout the day.

There are no official priests today. Every believer *is* a priest, but there are no priests-by-office. Those called priests are only so according to the traditions of man. True priests are only ever in the

line of Aaron, or in the order of Melchizedek, and we do not have either today except for Jesus Christ, the faithful High Priest of our Christian confession.

- C. “But they had no child.” The lack of children was not a sign of the curse of God. The text of Scripture warrants us to be absolutely certain that Zacharias and Elizabeth were not suffering afflictions for some unrighteousness. They were both righteous before God and blameless in their law-keeping conduct.

In terms of broader application, just because you are not blessed in some way does not necessarily mean that your conduct is wrong before the Lord. And it also does not mean that your *standing* before the Lord is wrong. It certainly may be wrong—but that is not ascertained based on whether you have an affliction or not. Your standing is right before God if you trust in Christ. If you do not trust in Him, then you are in a bad standing with God.

- D. Back to the narrative, what do you suppose this couple was praying for more than anything else? In this historical and religious context, and with the following textual information, I think we can say with certainty that they were praying for a child. They probably had been praying for years, like Isaac did for his wife for 20 years (Genesis 25:21).
- E. According to the traditional ordering of 24 divisions of priests, it came time for Zacharias’s twice annual trek to Jerusalem and service at the temple. He was in the “Abijah division” of the priests, the eighth of 24 (1 Chronicles 24:4-19, note v. 10). He would only be “lucky enough” to be chosen one time in his life to offer incense in the temple. Some priests never got the opportunity. It was at this time—when the lot was cast and the decision was from the Lord (Prov. 16:33)—that Zacharias was to meet the angel Gabriel.
- F. This is remarkable because Gabriel appeared in the Biblical narrative 500 years earlier to Daniel in Daniel 8:16 and 9:21. Angels live forever; they do not die. In those passages and here, as well as 1:26, are the four times that Gabriel appears in the Bible.

- G. The typical response to an angel-sighting is fear. Zach did not vary from the norm. The angel reassured him: “Do not be afraid...your prayer is heard.” What a blessing. “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers.” Not only did God know the prayer, but so did the angel. Gabriel brought the answer, just like he did to Daniel centuries earlier (Dan. 9:21).
- H. There were corresponding actions for Zacharias: obviously, go home to his wife for one; but also, to name the boy John. For some reason he had to be called that. He was not Elijah (John 1:21).
- I. Joy. The two parents and immediate family will experience immense joy because they have a baby. Their reproach is taken away. In this case, they had to wait for God’s timing to be exactly right so that John would live at the time of the first coming of Messiah. Their earlier “sorrow” was replaced by joy. In addition, many others, including people in the hill country of Judea, would hear about this and rejoice with this couple.
- J. The angel proclaimed that John would be a great man—but not just in the sight of other people. He would be great in the sight of God, whose evaluation is the only one that truly matters. In fact, the Lord Jesus said this: “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist” (Matt 11:11). He would also be a Nazirite from the womb, like Samson was supposed to be. He would not consume alcohol at all, to avoid dulling his senses but more importantly to stay pure before God.
- K. The Spirit of God filled John from before birth throughout his life. This means that his thinking and conduct were influenced by the Spirit of God for his entire life. This does not mean that he was immune from sin, nor from some of the challenges that commonly face mankind. But his *pattern* and lifestyle was Spirit-filled. See Luke 1:41.
- L. John’s ministry. He will call people to turn back to God. He will serve God in the likeness of Elijah, like how Elijah will serve in the end-time (Malachi 4:5-6). This will result in at least some fathers and children being reconciled, sinners being made wise, and people made ready for the Lord to come.

II. Zacharias Doubts and the Angel Gives a Sign, v. 18-22

A. Zacharias had just learned that he and his wife were going to have a baby boy. But he did not believe it. This was not good.

He was in a different situation than Mary, who had no husband and was going to experience a type of birth that had never happened before in the world and would never in the future. But Zacharias? He was going to have a child the old-fashioned way, albeit with a little bit of a surprise element to the timing.

I understand that Zacharias was without excuse for his doubt. He was a priest. He was a man who believed in God. He was older. He had a wife. He knew the Old Testament revelation. He knew Abraham and Sarah's story about waiting years for a child (Gen. 11:30). He knew about Isaac and Rebekah waiting for a long time for a child (Gen. 25:21). He knew about Manoah's wife who was barren and how an angel had appeared to her and promised a son to be born—the mighty hero Samson (Judges 13:2-3). He knew about Hannah's inability to bear a child, yet God gave her Samuel in answer to her prayers (1 Samuel 1:2). Consequently, the angel struck Zacharias with the inability to speak for a few months. This served as a sign proving the angel was giving a true message.

B. I think I would have responded similarly with incredulity, so I am not offering a harsh criticism of Zacharias. We often respond quickly with what is on our minds. God gave the old priest some time to think about his response and refocus his speech for a later wonderful expression of faith in God in the Benedictus. Zacharias was silent *after* he expressed disbelief. We should be silent for a while *before* we express our unbelief! That will give us time to think and put our faith ahead of our doubts.

III. Elizabeth becomes Pregnant, v. 23-25

A. At the end of the week of service in Jerusalem, Zacharias returned home. God enabled Elizabeth to have a child the natural way with her husband.

B. Weeks later when she knew she was pregnant, she offered thanks to God. He had taken away her reproach, that stigma of

barrenness. It was a real stigma, although it should not have been so.

- C. There could have been some embarrassment (?) in her heart, being pregnant and so old. She kept herself away from people for the next 5 months in response to God's work. No doubt this was a time of great emotion, physical difficulty, and great gratitude toward the Lord.
- D. Little did she know that her son would be terribly mistreated by the governing authorities about 30 years future (Matthew 14:3, Luke 3:19-20). It is likely that she and her husband had died and were in Paradise by that point, given that they were already much older—so they did not have to experience the pain of watching their son go through this.

Conclusion

John and his parents are fine examples for us. By God's grace, we too can:

- Be righteous before God by faith;
- Be upright on our conduct;
- Experience answered prayer and the joy of it;
- Lead our children to be good in God's sight, though they may not embrace John's way for themselves;
- Avoid alcohol and other impure things;
- Be filled with God's Spirit;
- Be an agent to point people to God;
- Believe God's word;
- Be thankful to God when He gives gifts to us.

The bigger picture was that God was setting up for One far greater than John to come and provide redemption for His people. John is a pointer to Jesus, a man great in his own right, but comparatively unworthy to loosen the sandal straps of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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