

SERMON NOTES ON LUKE 1:5-25

(The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist).

The background to our text, Luke 1:5-25 started **LONG AGO** when **THE LORD SPOKE**. God spoke through Isaiah (40: 3-8) that before the "glory of the Lord" would "be revealed", a forerunner would be sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Malachi had added that before the day of the Lord came, the prophet Elijah would be sent to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers..." (Mal. 4:5-6). And now, more than four hundred years after Malachi, the seemingly interminable night was coming to its end: The dawn was about to break.

The forerunner to the long awaited Messiah had to be born. In God's wisdom, a certain Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth, long since chosen to be the forerunner's parents, needed to be advised of the coming birth, and instructed how to bring up the child in the strict discipline appropriate to the unique Elijah-like ministry that he was destined to fulfil. (See Luke 1:13-17).

Zachariah and Elizabeth both belonged to the priestly line of Aaron and were both upright (righteous RSV) in the sight of the Lord. This does not negate what the Bible says that there's none righteous, or perfect. It is that they manifested exemplary godliness in comparison to other people, much like Job. **BUT** there was one unsolvable problem – **Elizabeth was barren**.

To be childless 2000 years ago was seen as an indication that they were under God's disfavour because of some secret sin. Think of the grief they had carried over the years! Luke tells us that "they were both well along in years", or quite old (MESSAGE).

However, At the right time, GOD REMEMBERS HIS OATH. A study of the meaning of the names of Zacharias and Elizabeth in Hebrew reveals a lot about the character of God, who is the principal Character in this story.

Zachariah (Hb) Zakaryah

Elizabeth (Hb) Elisheva

Zakar –to remember; Yah – Yahweh (God)

El – God; Sheva – Oath

God remembers

Oath of God

Mr.Zakaryah & Mrs Elisheva translate to

GOD REMEMBERS HIS OATH

What a beautiful hint of what is to come! They would have a son who will be the forerunner of the long awaited Messiah according to God's word spoken about 500 years ago through the lips of Isaiah and Malachi. At the end of the Old Testament (Malachi 4), there was complete silence from God for 400 years. Luke now tells us that the silence is broken through the arrival of this new prophet-like Elijah – John the baptiser, whose birth is announced in today's text. Luke 1:5-25).

God's silence does not mean indifference or absence. So the next time you think God has forgotten you or does not care about you, remember our God does not forget any of his promises. Read Ps. 145:13...2 Peter 3:9.

At the time of this event, there were about 20,000 priests, descendants of Aaron, on the book, eligible to serve in the temple. However, only 14 of them were given the privilege of offering incense in a year and that opportunity came around, only once in a lifetime. So, in ten years, only 140 priests would have had such an honour and privilege, and only one person from this group, chosen by God's lottery, would offer the incense and prayers of the people. At the end of offering, the priest would come out and say the Aaronic blessing: God bless you, and keep you, God make his face to shine upon you...(Numbers 6:24-26)

THE PROMISE BECOMES REALITY: Back to our story. Verse 11. As Zechariah prayed and ministered in the Holy Place, He suddenly realized he was not alone. An angel appeared at the right side of the altar of incense. The angel, announces to Zechariah that his prayer has been heard and goes on to provide Zechariah with quite a bit of information regarding the events that will follow: Elizabeth will bear a son (v.13). He is to be named John (v.13). He will cause them joy and delight (v.14). Many will rejoice at his birth (v.14). He will be great before the Lord (v.15). He is not to drink any wine or strong drink his whole life because he is to be consecrated to God. (v.15). He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (v.15). He will turn many in Israel back to God (v.15). He will go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah (v.17). He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children (v.17). He will turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just (v.17). He will make ready for the Lord a people prepared. (17)

This is a lot of information. This is exactly the type of run-down of future events that I wish God would give me, but He hardly does. He just says, "trust me".

What was Zechariah's Response: V.18 "How can I be sure of this? It's like saying, 'You can't be serious.' I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." So, Zechariah asks for a sign.

The angelic visitor is not amused. The angel must have taken a deep breath and said, "I don't do jokes with people's pain and destiny! I am Gabriel. And, because you have not believed me, **you shall be unable to speak until this word is fulfilled.**" Zechariah is literally dumbstruck.

The action of the angel was neither vindictive nor arbitrary. In a few minutes Zachariah was expected to go outside, and, as priest on duty for the day, in God's name, pronounce God's blessing on the waiting people. But **a priest who cannot believe the authoritative word of an angel of God, because he cannot accept the possibility of divine intervention to reverse the decay of nature and the barrenness of his old wife, has lost faith in the basic principle of redemption.** Without redemption, he has no gospel. Without a gospel, any blessing he pronounced upon the people would be an empty professional formality.

If Zechariah could not believe the angel's good news, it was better that he did not pretend to bless the people. Fittingly the angel struck him dumb.

And doesn't that speak to us? Not only to us preachers, called to forth-tell his redemption, but it speaks to all of us who are called by the name of Christ. Do we really believe that God is sovereign -- that God is in control -- that He can recreate any vessel?

Think about it as it relates to your prayers. Scripture tells us that Zechariah and his wife had been praying for a child. The first thing the angel said to him was, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."

It is not our task to define the limits to which God's power may go but to partner with God, to give ourselves as channels through which His power may work -- but most of all -- to know and acknowledge that He is sovereign.

At the root of Zechariah's doubt is this: For Elizabeth to conceive, God would have to intervene and put "the processes of ageing and decay into reverse." Zechariah did not believe that was possible.

"If God could not revive Elizabeth's ageing and dying body, how would he ever incarnate in a virgin's womb, or raise from the tomb, the body of Jesus after three days in the grave? And if that resurrection was impossible, our own resurrection would be impossible.

The couple went home and Elizabeth conceived. God cannot be stopped. Whatever He promises, He will bring it to pass, even when we are faithless and inconsistent. God still gave Zechariah a son in spite of his negative response to the angel's declaration. It's time to stop creating God in our image and let Him create us in His. Will you trust Him

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION.

1. In the light of this passage, what does it mean for you to be open to God's sovereignty and omnipotence (having great power and influence) when praying? (Discuss)
2. Identify the predictions of the angel concerning John the Baptist in verses 13-17.

3.What is the implication of Zacharias' doubt as it affects the gospel (Virgin birth and resurrection). **(4).** What do we learn about God's character with respect to His promises? **5)** Are the names of Zechariah (Zakariya) and Elizabeth (Eli sheva) just a coincidence or part of God's masterplan?

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2024