

Message #4

Luke 1:10-25

In my library I have 56 books on the subject of prayer. Each book helps give a Biblical understanding of the doctrine of prayer. Most of the books deal with topics like:

1) Defining prayer; 2) Importance of prayer; 3) Types of prayer; 4) How to pray; 5) Hindrances to prayer. **But one thing that most of the books don't discuss much is what should be our response when God answers prayer.**

Luke carefully researched all of this data about Jesus Christ for a man named Theophilus. He wanted him to know the exact facts about what happened. I am convinced that a lot of the information in the first two chapters came from Mary who spent time with Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-40). She knew the specific details and how all of this happened and it is clear that Luke begins the story by connecting it to prayer.

Zacharias was a very godly man (1:6). Certainly part of any godly man is prayer. One of the things that he and Elizabeth had prayed about was a baby (**1:13**). Obviously for years they had prayed for a child. The verb "has been heard" (**v. 13**) is aorist passive. What that means is Zacharias and Elizabeth had prayed that prayer a long time ago and now God was going to answer it. God made a sovereign determination that now was the time for Him to answer that prayer and they would be the recipients of that answer.

Now you would naturally think that when Zacharias learned this, he would have been jumping for joy. We would naturally think he would have started thanking and praising God. **But that is not what happened. Instead of thanking God and praising God, he doubted God.**

The story opens with Zacharias doubting God. This was the most significant moment of Zacharias' life. He should have been rejoicing (**1:14**); but instead he is doubting (**1:20**). The result was he in many ways missed out on the most critical event in all of history.

There is a lesson for all of us to learn from this:

WHEN GOD SPECIFICALLY ANSWERS OUR PRAYER AND WE DOUBT, DISBELIEVE OR QUESTION, WE WILL MISS OUT ON THE FULL JOY AND IMPACT THAT WE SHOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED.

That is what happened to Zacharias. The story of Jesus Christ coming into the world did not start as a great story of faith; it started as a story of doubt. The nation Israel had been praying that God would send their Messiah and when He answered the prayer, hardly anyone believed it, including the most godly people on earth.

Now this section breaks down into two main parts:

PART #1 – God informs Zacharias that his prayer for a child had been answered. **1:10-17**

Now Zacharias and Elizabeth had been praying for a child (1:7). Every Jewish couple wanted a child, and specifically a son. But I am sure neither Zacharias nor Elizabeth had any notion that God was about to answer that prayer at this time.

Zacharias was performing his priestly duty and according to **verse 11**, God sent the angel Gabriel (**v. 19**) to Zacharias. While Zacharias was inside the Holy Place, the angel showed up and stood to the right side of the “altar of incense.”

The altar of incense was in the Holy place, just in front of the Holy of Holies. This altar is specifically connected to offering incense that has to do with offering prayer requests to God (Rev. 8:3-4). Prior to approach God directly through Jesus Christ, prayers to God made by Israelites were filtered through this sacred Temple ritual.

According to **verse 11**, as Zacharias was offering the incense, an angel of the Lord showed up. Zacharias didn't expect that to happen anymore than we would expect it to happen, when we are praying.

According to **verse 12**, Zacharias was “troubled” and “afraid.” That word “troubled” means he was physically trembling and the word “fear” means he was experiencing intense fear, dread and terror. He was literally terrified and he was shaking. As Trent Butler said in his commentary, he had “pulse stopping fear and hair raising terror” (*Luke*, p. 8).

It is interesting that the angel does not rebuke him for that. He will try to stop him from being so afraid, but he does not reprove him for this response. Frankly, there ought to be a fear of the Lord in every believer and certainly that will exist when we see the Lord.

Now according to **verse 13**, the angel informed Zacharias that he did not need to be afraid for five reasons:

Reason #1 - Because your prayer has been heard. **1:13b**

The research Luke did here is amazing. The pronoun “your” is singular. So he is telling Zacharias that what you have been praying about yourself is being answered right now. Now of course as priest, he had been praying for several things—for Israel's repentance, for the Messiah to come and then, of course, there were the personal prayers for a baby. **Frankly, all of his prayers were about to be answered at the same time.**

This is certainly one of the great fear eliminators, knowing God has heard your specific prayer. There is an article “the” before the noun petition, which refers to his specific prayer. Now the idea of God hearing the prayer is not just hearing audible sound; it is the idea of God hearing the prayer, receiving it and making a decision to answer it.

Reason #2 - Because your wife Elizabeth will have a baby boy. **1:13c**

The angel says you have always wanted a child, well you are about to get a boy. To the Jewish mind, a baby son was the ultimate blessing of God. Every Jewish woman longed to give birth to the Messiah. When a barren woman was given a baby, was considered to be a great praise to God (Ps. 113:9).

Reason #3 - Because you will give your son the name John. **1:13d**

Whenever God names the person, it is always something very significant. If God picks the name, this person is very important to His plan and program. When God chooses the name, that person ends up being one who has a very specific mission from God and is of great prestige in the sight of God.

For example, God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17:5). God changed Jacob's name to Israel (Gen. 32:28). God changed Saul's name to Paul, and in this text, he names this son "John." By God doing this, we know that God is going to use him in a major way in His program. It is interesting that Jesus Christ gives every believer a new name (Rev. 2:17). What that would mean is that every believer is a critical part of the program of God.

But the angel does not stop here. He has more good news to bring Zacharias.

Reason #4 - Because your son will bring you joy and gladness. **1:14a**

Again the angel uses the singular pronoun. This boy would bring Zacharias great joy. When you are a father or mother, you wonder what your children will grow up to be. You certainly hope they won't grow up to be a great disappointment to God or to you. Well Zacharias could know his son would be a winner.

Zacharias could stop being afraid because this son is joyous news for Zacharias and Elizabeth. This is wonderful news.

Reason #5 - Because your son will cause many to rejoice. **1:14b-17**

Not only will your son bring joy to you, but he will bring joy to many in the world. Now this son would not cause everyone in the world to rejoice, but many will rejoice. The only ones who would rejoice would be those who would believe in the One about whom he would preach.

In fact, there are five specific explanations that Gabriel states which explains why John would bring joy to so many:

(Explanation #1) - John will be great in the sight of God. 1:15a

It is one thing to be great in the sight of people; it is another to be great in the sight of God. The adjective “great” is often used to describe the rank and position of an individual. Of all the sons born of a woman, John was the greatest prophet of all (Matt. 11:11). In fact, Jesus said there was no one greater than John who had ever been born (Luke 7:28). **What made him so highly ranked is that he was the prophet singled out by God to introduce Jesus Christ to the world.**

Don’t overlook the fact that he was great in the sight of the Lord. Introducing Jesus Christ to people does not make one great in the sight of the world, but it does in the sight of God. In fact, Paul said that those who proclaim the Gospel are beautiful in the sight of God (Rom. 10:15).

(Explanation #2) - John will function as some type of unusual Nazarite priest. 1:15b

Zacharias would not follow in the priestly footsteps of his father as a priest in the Temple and he also would be very different than Jesus Christ (Luke 7:33-34).

He would be under a very unique and strange Nazarite vow his entire life. When an O.T. priest would go into the Tabernacle, he was not allowed to drink any wine or strong drink while performing the ministry (Lev. 10:8-9). We learn from Numbers 6:1-21 that there were several different stipulations placed on a Nazarite at the time of his vow; but once his service time was over, he could participate once again (Num. 6:13-21) and once again drink wine (Num. 6:20). Jesus, for example, drank wine and John didn’t (Luke 7:33-34).

What seems to be the issue here is that John would be under this unusual Nazarite vow his entire life, even from his mother’s womb. His ministry would be that of presenting and introducing the God/Savior/Messiah/King to Israel and so he would be a very rare kind of prophet.

(Explanation #3) - John will be filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb. 1:15c

In the O.T., the concept of Spirit filling was one that meant one was specifically anointed by God’s Spirit and Divinely given the ability to serve God in a key position of leadership. Zacharias could rejoice knowing his son would be filled with God’s Spirit even before he was born. In other words, John would not know one second of life apart from the Spirit’s filling. God’s sovereign plan and purposes would be worked out through John, even in his conception.

(Explanation #4) - John will turn many from Israel back to the Lord. 1:16

His ministry will not be aimed at Gentiles; his ministry will be aimed specifically at Israel. Many Jewish people would turn back to Him because they would believe on Jesus Christ as the Messiah and get back into a relationship with Him. John would turn many people back to the Lord their God. Not everyone would accept John or his message; but many would and that is what made him great.

This is significant. What makes one great in the sight of God is one who turns others back to Him.

(Explanation #5) - John will be the prophetic forerunner of the Lord. **1:17**

The angel says this will be John's central mission. John would be a powerful prophet. He would be as powerful as Elijah (I Kngs17-II Kings 2). God used Elijah to turn many Israelites back to the truth from the heresies and godlessness of King Ahab and Jezebel.

In the same way, John would be used to turn many Israelites away from the heresies of the Pharisees and the heresies of the Scribes and Sadducees. He would have a powerful and impacting ministry that would accomplish three objectives:

Objective #1 - He would turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children. **1:17a**

In other words, God would use John to show Israel that they were not mature in their knowledge; they were immature. They needed to become children to believe, learn and grow.

Objective #2 - He would turn those disobedient into those who would be righteous. **1:17b**

He would convince people that they needed a righteousness they did not have. They would be turned from a rebellion religion into a righteous relationship.

Objective #3 - He would prepare the people to meet the Lord. **1:17c**

He would actually have the privilege of seeing Jesus Christ and introducing Him to Israel.

What amazing news. This angel Gabriel comes to Zacharias and says this is what God is going to do with your son.

You would think Zacharias would be on some heavenly cloud. Truth is he didn't believe it.

PART #2 – Zacharias doubts and disbelieves God's Word. **1:18-22**

Instead of Zacharias being overjoyed, he didn't believe it and in a typical Jewish unbelieving mindset, he asks God for a sign (I Cor. 1:22). The Jews always want signs.

You would think Zacharias would say—you know I don't typically have some angel show up and talk to me. He wanted something more than that. Maybe he thought he was dreaming or hallucinating.

Verse 18 is critical. Zacharias made a major theological error in that he assumed that the answer to this prayer and the fulfillment of it depended on him. This is where doubt and disbelief originates. We look to ourselves rather than looking to God.

Zacharias says to the angel, well how will I know this for certain, since I am an old man and my wife is old too? So he believed the fulfillment of all of this depended on him. **Answered prayer does not depend on our ability, it depends on God.**

Gabriel responded to the insanity of Zacharias in two ways:

Response #1 - The angel says my presence is enough for you. **1:19**

Gabriel says who do you think you are talking to here? I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

Zacharias would have known the book of Daniel and he would have known that Gabriel is a high ranking angel whose job it is to take messages specifically pertaining to Israel from the presence of God to the people (Dan. 8:15-17; 9:20-22; Luke 1:26-28).

Gabriel says you want a sign; here I am standing here talking to you.

Response #2 - The angel says okay I will give you a sign. **1:20**

Gabriel says you want a sign, okay; because you don't believe me or the Word of God, your sign will be you cannot talk or speak until this prophecy is fulfilled. In other words, you will go out of this Temple and you will not be able to say a word until your son is here.

According to **verse 21**, the people were waiting outside wondering why Zacharias was taking so long in the Temple. The people were getting concerned. It usually didn't take the priest all that long to go in and offer up the incense. So they were concerned. According to Jewish tradition the priest was supposed to come out and pronounce an Aaronic blessing on them (Num. 6:24-26).

According to **verse 22**, when he finally did come out, he couldn't speak. This is so sad. This is the greatest moment in the life of Zacharias and he cannot tell anyone about it because God has closed his mouth. He had to communicate through some game of charades. He is making signs to the people trying to tell them what happened in there. This must have been something to see.

His doubt and disbelief of God's Word left him powerless. It caused him to miss the full impact of this amazing moment.

According to **verses 24-25**, God did exactly what He said He would do. He kept His word. Elizabeth became pregnant and she kept herself in seclusion for five months when she could show everyone that she was in fact pregnant. God had taken away her reproach.

But Zacharias missed out on some of the blessings of the moment.