

Message #7**Luke 1:57-66**

One of the most famous stories in the Bible is the story found in I Samuel 17, the story of David and Goliath. David was sent by his father, Jesse, on a 20-25 miles trip from Bethlehem to the Valley of Elah. His job was to take some food and check up on his brothers.

When he got there, this champion warrior of the Philistines, named Goliath, came out in the valley and started yelling at and intimidating the Israelites. He demanded that some Israeli come out and fight him in one winner take all match. If the Israelite won, the Philistines would serve Israel and if the Philistine won, the Israelites would serve the Philistines.

David heard this and said, “who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” He said, “I’ll fight him.” God will give victory. Well you would think the people would have rejoiced and said, “Finally we have someone in this camp who is willing to go to war for God.” But that is not what happened.

First, David’s older brother Eliab started to question him and hassle him and he actually accused him of being proud and wicked. He said David was just out for fame. Then all the other brothers said you need to go back to the sheep. Then Saul criticized David. He criticized his age, his size and his ability. He tried to get David to put on special armor. All David was interested in doing was the will of God and what he discovered is there were many people close to him who tried to stop it.

When you purpose to do the will of God, you can count on opposition. That opposition will not primarily come from enemies, or from blatant heathens; it will come from family and friends. **That is what Zacharias and Elizabeth learned when they simply wanted to obey God and name their baby.**

We must stop to ask ourselves why Luke included this story. Of all of the things he could have put in his letter, why did he include a story about family and friends who quibble and argue about the name of a baby? Luke wanted to communicate a very important point:

WHEN YOU PURPOSE TO OBEY GOD’S WORD, OFTEN TIMES IT WILL GO AGAINST RELIGIOUS TRADITION AND YOU WILL FACE OPPOSITION FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS; BUT IF YOU REMAIN FAITHFUL, IN THE END YOU WILL INFLUENCE THEM.

Now let’s remind ourselves of the context. Mary had left, after spending three months with them and now the baby was born. The angel Gabriel had come to Zacharias, and told him that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son and he told them that they were to name the son John (Luke 1:13). We know that both Zacharias and Elizabeth were two people very interested in obeying the Word of God (Luke 1:6). So they would naturally name the baby John, which is what God wanted.

Everything went just as planned. According to **verse 57**, Elizabeth gave birth to a son, just as Gabriel predicted. This is truly a miracle baby.

Just last week on May 24, 2018, a baby was born on a ship that was given the name “Miracle.” Sixty-eight migrants got in a rubber boat from Libya and headed out into the Mediterranean, hoping to reach Italy. A rescue ship found the people and took them aboard and a mother had her baby. So she named the baby Miracle. Now the truth is that baby is not a miracle. We would agree that God’s sovereignty was involved in letting them be found and rescued, but the mother was young and the baby was just a normal birth in unusual circumstances.

This baby of Elizabeth was a true miracle baby. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were well beyond child-bearing days and God had miraculously given them this baby.

So far everything is right on track and everything is going just as predicted and planned. That is until the baby was born. Then the opposition came. It did not come from Gentile heathens; it came from very concerned Jewish family members and friends.

These friends seemed to be very concerned. Their arguments were very logical, but they were unspiritual and they were opposing the Word and will of God. **The fact is Zacharias and Elizabeth knew God’s will and the family and friends, no matter how spiritual they thought they were, did not know God’s will.**

Doing God’s will in accordance with God’s Word is often times a lonely proposition. People may criticize, question, challenge and even condemn. The people may be those closest to you. But if we purpose to do God’s will and obey God’s Word, we will see God do some wonderful things.

There are six details that Luke gives us here:

DETAIL #1 – The family and friends emotionally respond. 1:57-58

The narrative begins positive and it is emotionally wonderful. You have a new baby born and the friends and relatives are all happy about it. They all knew this was the work of God and they were “rejoicing” with this couple. They all knew that God had mercifully done something very special for this couple and they were all rejoicing.

That word “rejoice” is an emphatic form of the word. This was a very intense rejoicing. It was a very intense, emotional response. **We may see here that initial emotional responses to God’s Word and work mean nothing.**

Undoubtedly these were some of the same people who had been ashamed of Elizabeth because she had not given birth to a child (Luke 1:25). These were some of the same people who had probably called her old “barren” woman (Luke 1:36).

These are probably the same people who had verbally ripped her to shreds, but now that they see God's mercy has been displayed, they are rejoicing. But it won't be long until they will actually be opposing the will of God.

Emotional responses prove nothing. An emotional response to the Word of God is not the same as a real spiritual response to the Word of God. In fact, the Lord taught that emotional responses prove nothing (Matt. 13:20-21).

Don't be fooled by emotional outbursts and surges. Don't use emotional reactions as a basis for determining true spirituality. Just because someone sheds tears, does not mean they will change. Just because someone's emotions are moved, does not mean someone's heart is transformed.

DETAIL #2 – The family and friends religiously respond. 1:59

According to the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law, a son was to be circumcised on the 8th day (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). Naturally, Zacharias and Elizabeth were very faithful to obeying God's Word (1:6).

According to Jewish custom, the male child was typically named after his father or close relative. This seems to have been particularly applicable if the boy were born into the home of a priest. Josephus said that both he and his brother (Matthias) were given names from their priestly heritage (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 1).

Priest's sons were named after the father and were expected to follow in his footsteps as a priest. To name him something other than Zacharias would mean you are not following traditional religious norms and also it could be an indicator that the boy would not follow in his father's footsteps.

The circumcision of a baby boy was a time when the family and friends would gather to share the religious ritual. Heinrich Ewald said that the normal custom was to give a name to the son on the day he was circumcised, which was his 8th day of life (*Antiquities of Israel*, p. 96).

But there is absolutely no historical record or evidence that the responsibility for naming the child belonged to the neighbors or relatives. There is no evidence that they had any say whatsoever. The responsibility belonged to the parents.

The family and friends thought the name of the child should be Zacharias, after the father. **Now the choice the family and friends made for the name was logical, rational and traditional, but it was not Biblical and it was not the will of God.** So the response of this group, as well-meaning as it may be, is not a response true to God and His Word and will. The cultural norm is not the will of God. Even though they were well-meaning, they were dead wrong.

Some of God's greatest servants don't follow traditional norms. Great servants are after a careful understanding and application of God's Word. They don't fit the norm. They don't follow the man-made traditions. They don't adhere to the religious rules of the denomination. They are after God's Word and applying it and they just don't fit the family norm. I have known many people who break away from the family traditional church because it was not feeding them the Word of God and family and friends didn't like it because it didn't fit the norm.

DETAIL #3 – Elizabeth takes a stand against family and friends for the will of God. **1:60**

Elizabeth said, “no way”. The word “no” (οὐχι) is as strong as can be (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 330). She means not at all, not a chance. His name will be John. Now Elizabeth did not learn this name from Gabriel, herself, she learned this from her husband.

Zacharias was the one who originally received the message from Gabriel as to what to name his son (1:13) and we know that when he got home he could not speak. Frederic Godet made an interesting observation in his commentary when he said more than likely Zacharias had written the name “John” on a wax tablet more than 100 times. Even though Elizabeth had not personally received this message from Gabriel, she knew her husband was one who was telling her the truth and she believed God's Word and took a strong stand against her family and friends.

It is a fortunate thing if a wife has a husband who knows God's Word. She will be blessed of God if she listens when her husband tells her the truth of the Word and she stands for it. Truth is the husband is to be the head of the home and this particularly has to do with matters pertaining to spirituality. Elizabeth stood for the Word of God because her husband stood for the Word of God.

DETAIL #4 – The family and friends argue against the will of God. **1:61-62**

Instead of the family and friends saying great, they decided to argue against God's Word and will and they were relentless in their argument. Had they gotten their way, the will of God would have never been fulfilled. The family and friends were putting pressure on Elizabeth and they appealed to her in two ways:

Appeal #1 - They appealed to tradition. **1:61**

These people are trying to stop this baby from being named John. They did so by reminding Elizabeth that there was no one in her family named John. They are basically saying you are breaking our tradition. This is not how we traditionally and typically do things. We name babies by some relative's name. **The traditions of men are often not the traditions of God.**

We have actually known of family and friends who tried to prevent someone from going to a church where they could actually learn the Word of God. Their argument is come on, this is the place where your family goes and this is the place where your friends are. Forget the Word of God; forget the will of God. That is what was happening here.

Appeal #2 - They appealed to Zacharias. **1:62**

They were not getting anywhere with Elizabeth, so they appealed to Zacharias. In the Jewish culture, the father had the final say in the naming of a baby, so since they could not get Elizabeth to compromise, they went after Zacharias.

They apparently did not know that she got the name from him. They should have figured if we can't crack Elizabeth, we won't crack Zacharias. These people are relentless. They go after the wife and that doesn't work so they go after the husband.

These people are trying to stop God's will in just the naming of a baby. When you know God's Word and will and you are purposing to do God's Word and will, you can expect severe opposition to it.

DETAIL #5 – Zacharias obeys the Word of God and does the will of God. **1:63-64**

Zacharias asked for a tablet and he wrote these words: “John is his name” (Ιωαννης εστιν ονομα αυτου).

The moment he wrote those words, his mouth was opened and he was able to speak and as you will see, his speech will be totally focused on praising God. God had fulfilled His Word literally and He removed the sign judgment and his temporary disability was over and he praised God.

Don't miss this in **verse 64**. The first thing he did when he could speak again was to praise God. He did not first address the people; the first thing he did was praise God.

DETAIL #6 – The family and friends respond to Zacharias. **1:63, 65-66**

I want you to notice that in the end it was not the family and friends who did the influencing, it was Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Response #1 - They were astonished. **1:63b**

The people marveled. They had never seen anything like this. A husband and wife focused on doing God's will and they were amazed.

Response #2 - They were afraid. **1:65a**

There is a healthy fear that people need. They need to fear God. They need to fear His Word and will.

Response #3 - They testified to others. **1:65b**

These people were talkers. In fact, one commentator said these people were gossipers and this is the spreading of “the gospel by gossip.” But at least these people who had stood against the will of God are now out testifying for the will of God.

Response #4 - They all knew the truth about John. **1:66**

The Greek literally reads they all kept this in their hearts. All people who heard about this realized this is not normal. They realized there was something special about this baby. They knew God’s hand was in this.

They all wondered what John would turn out to be. They knew God would be with him in a very unique way. This is probably one reason why many of the Jews years later would submit to his baptism (Luke 3:7). They certainly knew John was a unique recipient of the power of God.