

Luke 1: 11-25 (NASB)

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." 19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. 23 When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 25 "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

1. Luke is writing to Theophilus an orderly account of the story of Jesus
 - a. He's writing to all of the **Lovers of God** and those who will become lovers of God through the Gospel
 - b. so we can be grounded in the truth
 - c. To know what we believe and why we believe it
 - d. Luke begins by telling us the story of Zachariah & Elizabeth

I. Grace / divine gift

II. More Grace / divine discipline

I. Grace

1. **Vs. 13** Do not be afraid Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John
 - a. **Jehovah is a gracious giver**
 - b. Every gift given by God is one of grace

- c. What you are about to receive is an act of God's grace
- d. Everything that God does for His children is an act of Grace
- e. **1 Thes 5:18** in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- f. Our ability to move, reason, sleep, laugh, love, it's all a gift

2. **Your prayer is heard Zacharias, you will have joy at John's birth**

3. You will have joy as you've prayed for your nation, God is answering your prayer in 2 ways

- a. You will have a son; no more barrenness
- b. Your son will be the forerunner for the Messiah
 - i. The 69 weeks of Daniels prophecy (Dan 9:25) were about to be fulfilled
 - ii. John will usher in the most important person in all of history

1. This is God's grace to you and those around you
2. God is using what seemed to be a bad situation for extraordinary good
4. God's Grace is not a reaction to our situation
 - a. It's planned long before we were born
5. John is here by design at the right time

6. You are here by design

- a. There is no one here haphazardly
- b. God's sovereignty willed that we be alive right now
 - i. We're here by design (for such a time as this)
- c. **Jer 1:5** Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations

7. Your design matches your calling

- a. God wired John exactly how he should be to fulfill his calling
- b. He will be great in the sight of the LORD

- c. He will not drink liquor
- d. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb
- e. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord
- f. He will have the spirit and power of Elijah
 - i. Turning the hearts of the fathers toward the children
 - ii. And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just
 - iii. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord

8. God gave John the boldness of character of a prophet to speak the truth regardless of the consequences

9. We'll read how multitudes were drawn to John

- a. John didn't care about rebuking the king about his sin
- b. He was bold in speaking the truth to religious leaders
- c. That's how John was wired

d. The same is true for all of us

- e. We've been designed to match our calling
 - i. Prophecy
 - ii. Ministry

- iii. Teaching
 - iv. Encouraging
 - v. Giving
 - vi. Leading
 - vii. Mercy
- f. You are wired that way by God
- g. But you are wired uniquely
- h. Although John had the same spirit of Elijah, he didn't perform the same miracles of Elijah; no fire down from heaven...
- i. Each of us has our own race without comparing ourselves to others.
- j. Some may be thinking that God may have placed others here for a reason at this time, but not them
- k. Had any other conditions been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there (**Spurgeon**)
- l. This is God's Grace

II. More Grace

1. Zacharias said to the angel, "how shall I know this?"
 - a. How can I be sure of this? (NIV)
 - b. In light of this glorious experience, Zacharias is having doubts
 - c. Here is a blameless man who is chosen by God and hand selected to be in the Holy place and hear this message
 - d. Zachariah is requesting a sign
 - e. He's facing a moment of doubt
 - f. We all have those moments in our faith and stumble
 - i. Abraham had a moment when he had Ishmael
 - ii. David had a moment when acted insane
 - iii. Elijah had a moment & requested to die
 - iv. John the Baptist personally doubted when imprisoned
 - v. Early Christians in praying for Peter doubted his release
2. Every believer experiences moments of doubt and Zachariah was no different
3. Many people think doubt is the opposite of faith, but it isn't.
 - a. Unbelief is the opposite of faith.

- b. Unbelief [is] a willful refusal to believe, while doubt refers to inner uncertainty
- 4. [Others] think doubt is unforgivable, but it isn't.
 - a. God doesn't condemn us when we question him.
 - b. ... God is big enough to handle all our doubts and ... our questions
- 5. Many people think struggling with God means we lack faith, but that's not true.
 - a. Struggling with God is a sure sign that we truly have faith. If we never struggle, our faith will never grow. (**Pritchard**)
- 6. " One who has never doubted has only half believed"
- 7. One author wrote we have 3 levels of doubts (**Pritchard**)
 - a. **Intellectual doubts**
 - i. Is the Bible the Word of God
 - ii. Is Jesus the son of God
 - iii. Did Jesus really rise from the grave?
 - b. **Spiritual doubts**
 - i. Am I really a Christian?
 - ii. Why is it hard to pray?
 - iii. Why do I still feel guilty?
 - c. **Circumstantial doubts**
 - i. Why did these things happen to me?
 - ii. Where was God when all of this happened?

1. Leading to secret disappointment with God

2. The enemy whispers, "if God really loved you, He would allow all of this"

d. That may have been what Zachariah was struggling with

i. I know God loves me but why this trial?

8. In the matter of faith and doubt, the crucial thing is not our feelings and not even our faith. The crucial thing is the object of our faith.

a. You can have great faith in a faulty airplane, but it will crash in spite of your great faith because it's not a trustworthy plane.

b. You can have little faith in a sound airplane, just enough to get you on board, and that's all it takes to get you where you're going.

c. It's not your faith, but the object of it, that matters most.
(Cole)

9. **Gods response was to keep Zachariah silent for a season**

a. He becomes mute until John is born (why?)

- b. It was a chastening of the Lord
- c. The Lord chastens those He loves
- d. **God never punishes us**
- e. His corrections are for our benefit, not for destruction
- f. He's a loving Father, not vengeful

10. [One] suggested that Zacharias was struck [mute] by Gabriel because his fear was of saying something stupid...

- a. when the priest emerged from the temple, he was to pronounce a blessing on the people. Zacharias must have known that he would have to explain what had happened inside the holy place, and was afraid that no one would believe what he was promised; thus he asked for a sign.
- b. His speechlessness was an appropriate discipline for Zacharias, and it served to "announce" that something wonderful was about to happen.

c. What Zacharias could have announced with his tongue, God announced through his [silence]. (**Deffinbaugh**)

11. This rebuke, was a demonstration of More Grace and a blessing from God

a. **God could have selected another couple to use**

b. **Instead of punishment, He used correction**

c. **The kind of correction that drew Zachariah closer to God**

12. Zacharias went home, and in the course of time his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. After becoming pregnant, Elizabeth remained in seclusion for a five month period. ... there may have been two primary reasons for her seclusion

a. First, Elizabeth did not want to announce her pregnancy until she was so obviously pregnant that no one could deny it

i. ... Elizabeth knew that she would not have been taken seriously, and she would probably not have wanted to face any more cruel scorn, so seclusion was a simple answer

- b. Second, Elizabeth would have had to serve as a spokesperson for her husband, who could not speak, and seclusion kept her from having to perform this task. **(Deffinbaugh)**

13. We can learn from Zachariah's experience

- a. Although he was not able to speak or hear, his song in vs 68 reveals that he meditated on God's Word and promises
- b. He drew closer to God
- c. That is a great example to follow
- d. When we doubt, stop speaking about it to yourself and others
 - i. It's a good rule to follow, if you don't have anything edifying to say, keep silent
- e. Focus on God's Word and promises

14. G. Campbell Morgan had already enjoyed some success as a preacher by the time he was 19 years old. But then he was attacked by doubts about the Bible. The writings of various scientists and agnostics disturbed him (e.g., Charles Darwin, John Tyndall, Thomas Huxley...). As he read their books and listened to debates, Morgan became more and more perplexed [so] He cancelled all preaching engagements, put all the books in a cupboard and locked the door, and went to the bookstore and bought a new Bible. He said to himself, "I am no longer sure that this is ...the Word of God. But of this I am sure. If it be the Word of

God, and if I come to it with an unprejudiced and open mind, it will bring assurance to my soul of itself." The result? "That Bible found me!" said Morgan. The new assurance in 1883 gave him the motivation for his preaching and teaching ministry. He devoted himself to the study and preaching of God's Word.

- a. God is calling some to get alone with our Bible's until we have a meeting with God

15. **What did we gather today?**

- a. God is inviting us to realize that we are here by design and with a purpose

- b. God is welcoming us to be open about our doubts that He already knows about