

Theme: The disappointments of life can provoke doubt in even the strongest believers, but quiet reflection on God's Word and work can restore our faith and fill us with praise.

I. Through Their Eyes - Advent 2014

- A. Christmas through eyes of those who were there
- B. Not just for curiosity - we have much to learn
- C. Different person each week - today is Zechariah

II. A Devoted Couple

- A. Zechariah and Elizabeth are devoted to Yahweh

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to **the priestly division of Abijah**; his wife **Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron**.⁶ **Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.** Luke 1:5–6

- 1. Zechariah was a priest
- 2. Elizabeth Aaron's descendant
- 3. But they were also personally devoted to Yahweh

- B. The depth of their devotion to Yahweh

Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. Luke 1:6

- 1. Both of them were upright - a devoted **couple**
- 2. They were upright in God's sight - not just mans
- 3. They observed all of God's commands & regulations
- 4. They are called blameless - these are devoted folks!

III. The Pain of Disgrace and Disappointment

- A. The problem - they had no child

But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. Luke 1:7

- 1. They had no children - a deep personal wound
- 2. Elizabeth was barren - hope is dwindling
- 3. They were old - all hope is gone

- B. The result - disgrace and disappointment

- 1. They were disgraced in the eyes of others

"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away **my disgrace among the people.**" Luke 1:25

- a. It was a disgrace to not have children in their culture
- b. People whisper that they are not under God's favor
- c. People whisper there must be hidden sin
- d. Think of how Job's friends reacted
- e. Nothing worse than people piling on to our pain - but they do!
- f. Example: how people react to sickness

- 2. The deeper problem - disappointment with God

Both of them were **upright in the sight of God**, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.⁷ **But they had no children**, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. Luke 1:6–7

- a. They had faithfully followed God - but no child came

- b. They had cried out to God for years - but no child
- c. They had raised their hands in prayer - but no child
- d. This is even worse - you can turn from friends to God - but where to turn now?

IV. God's Encouraging Word

A. God is working miraculously in Zechariah's life

1. Zechariah is chosen by lot to offer incense
Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
Luke 1:8–9

- a. The dream of every priest - and it is Zechariah
- b. Zechariah did not choose this - Yahweh did!

2. An angel of God shows up in the Temple!
Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. Luke 1:11–12

- a. God is really at work here - an angel shows up
- b. Zechariah is filled with fear - who wouldn't be!

B. God's encouraging word to Zechariah

But the angel said to him: "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. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. Luke 1:13–15

1. A word of reassurance - do not be afraid

2. Your prayer has been heard - and not just your ritual priestly prayer
3. Elizabeth will bear you a son - God has heard you!
4. This child will be a joy and delight to you and others
5. This child will be great in the sight of the Lord

C. God's encouraging word about the child

He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:15–17

1. He is a special child - no alcohol - set apart like a priest on duty
2. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb
3. He will turn people back to Yahweh
4. He will be like Elijah
5. He is preparing people for the coming of God!
6. This is more than you ever asked or dreamed - God is exceeding all your prayers!

D. What an amazing encouraging word

1. God has heard your prayers & will answer
2. The answer is way more than you asked for!
3. This child will be a great prophet of God

4. This child will prepare the way for God to come!

V. Zechariah's Doubt - And God's Restoration

A. Zechariah responds with doubt

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."
Luke 1:18

1. Abraham asked the same question! (LXX words)
2. Zechariah knows what God did for Abraham
3. And this is no ordinary child - prophet of God
4. And no mere hunch - Gabriel came to him in Temple
5. But Zechariah is wanting a sign to show him
6. The years of disappointment make him doubt
7. Zechariah's disbelief was based on circumstances he could see and a history of disappointment. His first reaction was not to think of Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah's experiences of seeing God answer prayers for a child. He believed his past experiences more than he believed the testimony of scripture. (Liam Corley, BRCC devotional guide)

B. Gabriel responds with a word of judgement

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." Luke 1:19-20

1. Gabriel - God is mighty - responds strongly
2. I brought you good news - and you doubt instead of

rejoice?

3. Zechariah - how dare you doubt God!!!

4. You want a sign - here is one - you will be unable to speak until all is fulfilled

5. There is definitely a note of judgement in this

C. God's mercy during the judgement

1. But silence is not just judgement - it is mercy
2. Just like death after sin - unending fallen life is not real life, so judgement of death is also mercy and release
3. Zechariah does not have to explain
4. Zechariah has time to ponder, meditate
5. This also makes everyone notice the child - and the message
6. It lets everyone know that God is at work

D. Zechariah - filled with obedience and praise

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. Luke 1:62-64

1. Zechariah is obedient - his name is John!
2. Zechariah no longer doubts - he is filled with praise

E. Zechariah amazing song of praise

1. It is first and foremost about the coming Messiah -

Jesus!

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has **redeemed** his people. ⁶⁹ **He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David** Luke 1:67–69

- a. Redemption, horn of salvation - Messiah will save us
 - b. Not even future tense - he is filled with faith now!
 - c. As Messiah comes - it restores our hope and faith!
2. It recognizes that God’s remembers - no matter what our circumstances say!
to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. Luke 1:72–75
- a. Zechariah - Yahweh remembers - had thought Yahweh had forgotten!
 - b. Elizabeth - My God has sworn an oath - wondered if God had forgotten His oath
 - c. But as Messiah comes, he knows Yahweh has not forgotten!
 - d. The covenant promises are all coming true as the Messiah comes to us!
3. Months of silent pondering has done its work - faith is restored!

VI. Applying the Word - Through Their Eyes

- A. Has disappointment led us to doubt God?

1. Years of disappointment took a toll on Zechariah
2. He was obedient and and steadfast - but inwardly faith was shaken
3. Circumstances seemed so much louder than God’s promises
4. Has this happened to me - even secretly?
5. Do I ever feel disappointed in God and His ways?
6. Do circumstances drown out His promises?
7. If so, lets do three things:
 - a. Take time to silently meditate on God’s promises - especially concerning Christ and His coming
 - b. Ask God to come to you and restore your hope and faith
 - c. Praise God as He speaks and works in your life

B. The Table of Remembrance

Zechariah - The Dark Night of Doubt

Luke 1:18
November 30, 2014
Communion
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
Teaching keywords: Advent and Christmas, biblical characters, faith, meditation and silence

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” Luke 1:18